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Vol. XXXI.

TOM TEMPLE'S BIG STRIKE

BY BARRY RINGGOLD.



TOM UTTERED A CRY OF SURPRISE. WHAT HE SAW WAS THAT WONDERFUL "EYE"—THAT DAZZLING KNOB OF LIGHT, WHICH THE "MAGICIAN" HAD SAID WAS GOLD.

Tom Temple's Big Strike;

OR,

LITTLE BUCK, THE BOY GUIDE.

BY BARRY RINGGOLD.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

FAR away, among the rugged peaks, branching from the Rocky Mountains, on the borders of Montana, Tom Temple—the lone boy traveler, was awakened at dawn, from his slumber in a deep cave, by a succession of unearthly shrieks! Seizing his rifle, which lay by his side, he sprung to his feet, and looked about him.

The cave was a narrow one, and, as the entrance was small, but little light could come through it. The shrieks were repeated, and yet, looking in the direction of the noise, the boy could see nothing, owing to the gloom in that part of the hollow.

"They must be wild animals of some kind," he muttered. "Whatever they are, they seem to be coming this way!"

He cocked his rifle and stood firm.

Dim as the light there was, a spectator could have seen that this boy of sixteen was more apt to face danger than to retreat from it.

He had a resolute mouth, and blue eyes beaming with 'life' and spirit. Although of slender frame, he was of that compact, sinewy build, fitted for the endurance of trials and hardships.

He wore a sort of brown hunting-jacket, confined about the waist with a broad, leather belt, in which were thrust a pistol and a knife, and his pants were tucked into light but serviceable boots, of that enduring kind which are only found "out West." Upon the floor of the cave lay his wallet, containing a scant supply of provisions, and his rubber blanket, upon which he had slept, was spread near it.

Finally, as the lad peered ahead of him, he beheld eight round, glaring eyeballs shining upon him through the darkness, and he could soon make out the dim forms of square faces, ears and projecting bristles.

The cat-like visages and presently the figures of the animals, as they continued to approach, showed Tom that they were a large female wild-cat and her young, which his presence in the 'den' had probably disturbed.

"Pooh! is that all you are?" cried Tom.

And he laughed aloud as he spoke.

Evidently he was not used to these creatures and their ways, or he would not have felt so merry. Unless he had been hunting the cats for their skins—which was not the case—he should have quietly backed out of the cave, and sought other quarters, as this would have saved him much useless trouble and peril.

Taking aim at the female, he fired, and, hearing a yell of pain, he believed that he had hit her.

"Think I've finished her," he muttered, vainly trying to peer through the smoke, as he reloaded.

Scarcely had he rammed in his charge, when something came whizzing through the air, and the female cat was upon him—tooth and claw.

The claws dug into his breast, and the sharp fangs were about to fasten upon his throat, when, seizing the beast by the tail with one hand, he strove to hurl her away from him.

With an angry snarl she turned round, almost doubling her limber form, and fastened her teeth in the sleeve of his hunting-jacket. Ere she could bite through it, the boy drew his knife with his left hand and thrust it clean through her body.

The yell she gave almost deafened the lad, but instead of dropping, she scrambled madly up the

back of his arm, toward his neck, tearing at him with her claws as she went. At the same moment two of her offspring, about the size of small rabbits, jumped upon the boy from behind, and he could feel them racing up toward his head.

The position of the creatures prevented Tom's using either of his weapons, as he could not reach the animals with them, and, in a few seconds, his throat would have been torn to shreds, had not the well-aimed bullet from a rifle, which rung at that moment, passed through the brain of the larger cat, sending it wriggling and struggling to the ground.

"Ker-whoop!" came a ringing, boyish voice through the cave, "thar's one of the crit'ers floored. Stand still, stranger, so as to give me a crack at t'others!"

Tom obeyed the directions of his unknown preserver, and he soon heard two quick blows, and felt the other cats knocked from his back.

Turning, he saw the three on the ground, the large female dead and her offspring dying. A few more blows from the stock of the rifle carried by the intruder, finished the smaller animals.

Tom beheld before him a boy about seventeen, wearing a coonskin cap, with a hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins. Besides his rifle, he carried a pistol and a knife, the latter being very long and having a carved ivory handle, a little crooked near the top.

The face of this boy was good-humored, if not handsome, and deeply tanned by sun and wind. It was a rugged, honest face, with large, round, light-blue eyes, which were kind in expression, although very piercing. The youth was tall for his age, broad in the shoulders, and his arms seemed long enough for him to touch his knees. The rifle he held was a lengthy one, looking as if it could carry a great distance.

"I owe my life to you," said Tom, holding out his hand. "It must have tried you some, though, to hit that cat without touching me."

"Not a bit of it. Ef I couldn't make a better shot than that, I'd chew my own bullets! That's nothing to what I kin do!"

"You've done me a good turn, anyhow. How happened you to know about my being here and being attacked?"

"Why, the fact is, I wasn't fur from hyar, and I heard your rifle, which, with the yelping of them 'furnal cats, told me something of what was going on. So I stole up to the hole of the cave and crawling in, I fired. Now, then, jist tell me how you come hyar, for I kin see that you're no hunter, which is as plain as the shake of a bussler's tail!"

"How do you know I'm no hunter?" said Tom, a little annoyed.

"That tells the hull story," replied the other, pointing to one of the young wild-cats, lying dead, ahead of the two. This was one which had been hit by Tom's bullet when he fired at its mother.

"A hunter would hav known better than to shoot the young one instead of the parent," continued the stranger.

"But I fired at the parent," said Tom. Then he colored deeply, as it occurred to him that this would show still more his inexperience with the rifle.

His companion smiled.

"Well, come, it's no great shakes whether you're a hunter or not," said the boy. "I like your looks, and whatever may have brought you to these wild parts, I'm bound to stand your friend. My name is Buck Bowie, and I was brought up and got what little schooling I've had in Portland, Oregon, away off to the west of hyar, though my parents war from Kentucky."

"And mine is Tom Temple. Of one thing I'm certain, which is that I couldn't have picked up a better friend than you, or one more to my liking. You ask what brought me here?"

"You're not bound to tell ef you'd rather not. Perhaps I'm a little too curious to ask, but it's my way, and I hope you won't take offense."

"Instead of that, I'm all the more glad to tell you, as you may be able to give me some information about what I came here for. The truth is, I'm in search of my father, who went away from home six years ago. Mother's long pined about his not coming back, and that's why I determined to hunt him up. I'm all the way from Brooklyn, New York."

"What set you on this track for him?" inquired Buck. "Has he been seen out hyar?"

"He had a brother who was supposed to have gone to the Montana mines, and had not been heard from since he went. So father said he'd go and see if he could not look him up. Well, he went—that was six years ago—and he has not returned nor sent us a letter since he departed."

"That looks queer," said Buck slowly, shaking his head. "I don't like to say it, but it seems to me that he must hav 'gone under'—your not hearing from him so long."

"He may, but it is to find out something about him that I've come out here."

"Did you tramp it, or did you come in the mail-coach?"

"I came in the mail-coach from Salt Lake City. Soon after we reached Idaho, on inquiring at one of the adobe stations where we stopped. I learned from a half-caste there that a man who said he was on his way to Pleasant Valley Station had stopped there a week before. By the description of him, I thought he might turn out to be father; so I left the coach and tramped it to those three big mountains, 'The Three Tetons,' where the station lies, but when I got there, I could learn nothing of the traveler the half-breed had told me about. I rested there a little and got some provisions; then I kept on to finally get among these mountains."

"Sorry I kin tell you nothing about your father," said the other boy. "I've never heard of any one before of the name of Temple, but then I've been 'most always busy in these parts, hunting and trapping."

"Are you trapping, now?"

"No, nor won't for six or seven weeks to come. I expect a big party out hyar, then—all fust-class trappers—you kin be shore of that—and we're going to trap together. Fur the present, I'm stopping at Bannack Station, t'other side of the Rocky Mountain divide—where my comrades are to meet me. Thought I'd jest come out hyar to keep my rifle in practice by shooting a few deer, and perhaps a b'ar or two."

"I suppose you are a good shot?"

"You hit it well enough thar. I'm known among my cummarades, and also among some of the Injuns, by the name of 'Firedeath,' and I've given that name to my rifle."

"I wish I was a good shot."

"You must larn. I'll give you lessons, and I'll help you hunt for your father, too. I have no parents myself. Father and mother both dead, and a sister lost—probably dead too. Think the Injuns are 'countable for her death, and that's why I've always owed 'em a grudge, and not felt particularly squeamish, when I've had to shoot 'em to defend myself."

"They killed your sister?"

"I reckon so, but ain't shore. When she was four year old, we missed her. We lived at Portland, Oregon, then. Father and others hunted for her—this was ten years ago—but she couldn't be found."

CHAPTER II.

THE LAST SHOT.

THERE was something in the frank, manly bearing of Buck Bowie calculated to win the respect and esteem of a boy like Tom Temple.

Both lads, in fact, took to each other at once, and became friends.

They sat down on a rock and had breakfast together, Buck adding some nicely-cooked venison steaks, taken from his wallet, to his companion's scant allowance of salt pork and corn bread.

"The sooner you larn to shoot the better," said Buck, when their meal was finished. "Every one should know how to throw a bullet well in this kentry, whar thar's both wild animiles and Injuns. I reckon you've got good nerves?"

"I believe so."

"That's wanted for a good shot. Fust thing to do is to keep your rifle steady; then you can squint along the hind-sights and blaze away."

He then set up a target—a stick in a rocky crevice—and gave his first lesson to Tom Temple.

The latter was surprised at the progress he made under the tuition of his new friend, while the latter's wonderful shooting excited his admiration.

Placing the wand a hundred yards off, Buck split it in two with his bullet.

Scarcely had he done so, when a guttural exclamation sounded behind the twain, and, turning, they beheld half a dozen Indians, who had evidently emerged from the hollow of a rock, near where their presence had been unsuspected by the boys.

Both involuntarily drew their pistols, but, as he glanced at the dress of these people, Buck smiled and replaced his weapon in his belt.

"These are Snakes," he said to Tom. "They are not now unfriendly to the whites."

"Ugh! good shot," said one young Indian to Buck, as he pointed toward the split target, "but Red-Hoof can do it, too."

"Let's see you," said Buck.

He put up another wand in place of the split one, and, taking aim with his rifle, the Indian fired, hitting the object.

"You kin shoot some," cried Buck. As he spoke he blazed away at a wild pigeon, which was winging its way far above his head.

The bird, shot dead, dropped upon a shelf of rock, about fifty feet above the party. Just as Buck reloaded, the black head and snout of some animal was thrust from a hole in a rugged wall, near the bird to secure the prize.

As quick as lightning Buck fired at the head. Red-Hoof had seen it, too, and he also fired—both rifles going off simultaneously.

The black head swayed to one side, then it lay motionless—proving that the animal had been shot dead.

Followed by the Indians, the boys ascended to the shelf.

Buck dragged the dead animal from the hole.

"Hyar's a prize!" he shouted. "I knew it was a SILVER FOX, the moment I slapped eye on it!"

"A silver fox?" said Temple. "What can you do with it?"

"Do with it? Why, I'll be dog-gone ef I don't do a heap with it! The skin of this animile, which it kin be seen, is one of the fust class, will fetch \$90 or \$100 in the market! Tain't often you git a SILVER FOX in this part of the kentry, though thar's plenty brown and black ones!"

"Me shoot, too," said Red-Hoof, pointing at the head, where two bullet-marks proved that both the riflemen had hit it.

"You kin see that you didn't kill the critter," said Buck. "Your bullet passed through the skin, near the top of the head, and came out by the corner of one ear, but thar's *mine*, which you'll take notice went plum-center, between the animile's eyes, passing *through* the head! Fur that reason the prize belongs to me, and I'll take possession."

A dark flush crossed the young Indian's face and his eyes glittered.

"No matter if not kill—hit all same—so part belong to Red-Hoof," he said.

"That's Injun logic," cried Buck. "Not an ounce of the animile belongs to you by rights. It's mine, and I'll not give it up, ef I know myself."

Here an old Indian—the father of Red-Hoof, perceiving that a quarrel impended, stepped forward.

"Let there be peace between the Indian and his white brother," he said. "Two shots have killed

one fox, but the Indian does not want the fox. It is better the white boy should have it than that there should be trouble. The 'magic-man' has said that it would be a dark day for the red-man if he again quarreled with the whites—that he must leave them in peace if he would prosper."

"Thar's Greek fur me," said Buck. "What do you mean by the 'magic-man'?"

"Him great medicine-man. Me not ever see, but me hear about him from odder Indian—hear what he says, and what he says is good!"

"I'm still beat. Who is this magic-man—is he white?"

"It is so. His home is far away among mountains."

As he spoke the Indian pointed to the northeast, where the snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains were half-hidden by the clouds.

What sort of a man is he? Does he live alone?"

"I have said enough! I have never seen him, and the white boy should not wish to. If he does, he will come to harm, for I have heard that the 'magic-man' does not want to see his white brothers."

As the Indian spoke, he turned away and walked off, followed by his companions.

"You think that 'magician' the Indian spoke of may turn out to be your father?" remarked Buck to Temple.

"That thought occurred to me," said Tom.

"So it did to me. But don't be too hopeful. Thar's no sartinity that this 'magician' and your father are one and the same person."

"I am glad you got the fox without having a quarrel with those fellows," said Tom.

"So would I be if I was shore I had."

"What do you mean?"

"You kin never feel sartin about an Injun. That young Red-Hoof I could see plain enough wasn't satisfied to give up the prize. Ef he don't try in some way to git it yet, I'm mou'ty mistaken."

Having carefully taken off the fox-skin, Buck procured some flexible sapling twigs, which he fastened together in the form of a hoop with strings taken from his wallet. To this hoop he tied the skin, stretched taut, so that it presented something the appearance of a shield, and in that form he slung it to his back, fur inward.

"What is that for?" inquired Tom.

"Fur the skin to dry, though it would work better ef I could hang it up for a few days whar it could swing about in the air. Now, then, we're off for Bannack, which we kin take in on our way while looking up that magician, who I hope may turn out to be your father."

He struck off among the rugged mountain-paths, toward the southeast. The way was difficult and perilous in some places, where the boys were obliged to creep along narrow, rocky ledges, with deep ravines on each side of them.

They had been journeying for several hours and had just gained the top of a peak which they would be obliged to climb over to descend on the other side, when, chancing to look behind him, Buck uttered a slight exclamation.

Following the direction of his gaze, Tom beheld the form of an Indian, evidently that of Red-Hoof, about a hundred yards off, upon a rocky ledge bordering a deep, dark ravine. He had just raised his rifle and was now pointing it toward the young trapper.

"The mean skunk! I told you he'd be up to mischief!" cried Buck.

As he spoke the Indian fired, and his bullet passed so close to Buck's head that it grazed his ear.

"The raskil has given his cummarades the slip. They're far enough off by this time, you kin be shore," said the young trapper. "Load away as fast as yer like," he added, as the Indian proceeded to ram another charge into his piece. "You'll never fire another shot."

As he spoke he raised "Firedeath," its spiteful

crack rattled upon the air, and so perfect was his aim that Red-Hoof, shot through the heart, toppled over like a stone statue and fell headlong into the ravine.

"Thar!" said Buck, as he coolly proceeded to reload, "he's gone whar he'll never be found. Good-bye to Red-Hoof!"

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTURE.

On the next day, crossing Henry's Peak, the two boys descended into a deep valley with the enormous summits of the Rocky Mountains looming up ahead of them.

Instead of following the stage-route, Buck took a path which would lead him to Bannack by a shorter route. Although not so long as the other route, it was more difficult, and at night the boys found themselves far up among the stupendous crags of the mountain.

Buck had made a fire, and was cooking some coffee in a large tin cup taken from his wallet. The light from the fire extended some distance, bringing into relief the sharp, jagged walls of the rocks, which were piled in huge, fantastic masses about them. Just as they had drank their coffee and finished supper, the trapper laid a hand on his companion's arm.

"What is it?" said Tom.

"Injuns!" replied the latter in a low voice. "Hist! sit still and don't act as ef you know they are near," he added, as Tom was about springing up.

Temple regained his composure in a moment.

"Where are they?" he inquired.

He looked about him, but he could see nothing save the rocks with the light playing upon them, and here and there the dark masses of cedars and firs extending beyond.

"They are right ahead of us," was the answer. "There are about thirty of 'em."

"I can see nothing."

"Look on that rocky wall and thar you kin see their shadows—that is, the shadows of the'r heads, as they creep towards us, t'other side of that ledge."

Tom did behold moving, swaying shadows on the rugged wall, but he had thought these merely came from some dwarf cedars which were being shaken by the wind.

"You think they are enemies?"

"Ef they wasn't they'd not be creeping towards us that way, you kin be shore. I'm mou'ty mistaken ef they ain't Red-Hoof's people coming to revenge the death of that mean nigger. Somehow they've found out that he's been shot, and they kin now hev no rest until they've lifted our ha'r!"

Buck said this with the utmost coolness, while, in a careless manner, he picked up "Firedeath" which lay by his side.

"We must fight for our lives!" said Tom, as he cocked his piece.

"Easy, thar, easy!" answered Buck. "Soon as they come out from round the corner of that ledge, we'll see 'em. Blaze away at the fust one you see, and then follow me."

A few moments later two Indians came in sight from round the ledge. They had no rifles, but, flourishing their tomahawks and uttering an ear-splitting yell, they bounded toward the lads, followed by half a dozen others.

Crack! crack! went the boys' weapons, and two of the savages—one killed, the other wounded, fell sprawling on the rocks.

"Come!" said Buck.

Followed by Tom, he dropped down from the edge of the rocky platform on which they were seated upon a rock, eight feet below.

"This way!" he continued.

He darted into a hollow, as he spoke, pulling a loose boulder over the entrance as Tom followed him.

"I noticed this place, jest before we halted on the rock above," he said. "It leads under the rocks, and will bring us out at the other end, in the rear of the Injuns. The fust thing to do is to ram home some more fodder in our pieces, as thar mou't be red-skins at t'other end of this passage, on the watch fur us!"

Having reloaded, the boys moved on, Buck taking the lead.

So dark was the passage, and so swift were the movements of his guide, that Tom could hardly see him.

All at once he missed him.

He moved forward, to find himself at the further end of the passage.

The next moment his rifle was snatched from his grasp, he saw the outlines of dark faces, the gleaming of fierce eyes all around him, and, in a moment he was hurled down and his arms were pinioned with thongs.

"No use, Tom. Th' cussed niggers hev us fast!" came the voice of Buck, near him, also a prisoner.

The lads deprived of pistols, rifles and knives, were led off a short distance to a path among the mountains, where tied to some firs, they beheld the outlines of horses.

A fire was then kindled, by the light of which they now saw the forms and the fierce visages of the Snakes who had captured them.

There was a look of exultation in the eyes of these people.

"Ugh!" ejaculated the old chief, whose son Buck had shot, on the day before, "did the white boys think we were fools to let them have the fox-skin?"

"So you followed us?" said the young trapper, as the chief took the skin away from him.

"It is true. The boys had good rifles and we had none—no one except Red-Hoof. Enough of our tribe had been shot, and we did not want to lose more. That was why we waited—that we might get the skin without losing a man."

"You have not succeeded," said Buck. "You have lost two men!"

"It is so," answered the other calmly, while there was a terrible expression in his eyes. "But the torture of the white boys shall pay well for it. We are going to *burn out their hearts with firebrands!*"

A shudder passed through Tom's frame, but Buck showed no emotion whatever. He had, by taunting the old chief, learned from him, as he had wished to do, what fate was in store for him and his companion.

"The Snakes should beware," he said. "He spoke of the great white magician!"

The Indians had thrown the boys down upon their backs, and they were preparing to heap the firebrands upon Tom's breast when Buck spoke.

"It is true," answered the chief. "But what has the 'magician' to do with the boys? He does not like white people, and he will not care what the Snakes do."

"Thar you mistake. The white boy with me is the son of the *magician*, and when he learns that the Snakes have killed him he will be angry, and he will be revenged. He has a sealed box which he will open, and from which he shall send the small-pox, to carry off all thar are left of your tribe!"

These words were not without their effect upon the superstitious Indians, who, like many of their race, believed that the disease spoken of could be carried, sealed up in a box or bottle, by any white "medicine," and could be sent forth by his simply opening the dread casket.

"The talk of the young hunter may not be straight," said the old chief. "The white boy may not be the son of the 'magician.'"

"I kin tell you you'll soon find out ef you harm him," answered the young trapper.

The chief turned away, and, drawing his men apart, a consultation took place between them.

So interested were the savages in the subject that

all deserted the fire and gathered in a circle about their leader.

Taking advantage of this Buck contrived, unobserved, to draw himself close to the burning brands.

Finally, on one of these, a little detached from the rest, he placed the thongs that were about his wrists, and in a moment he had burned them nearly through.

One quick jerk of his arms then enabled him to completely sever the bonds. Still lying prostrate, he pulled a jack-knife from his pocket and cut Temple's cords.

"Make fur the horses! Kin you ride?" he whispered.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"We'll take the two horses nearest to us. You kin jump on the brown one and I'll git on the black. We won't be a second loosening the lariats from the tree. Now then!"

He sprung to his feet, and, followed by Tom, he reached the horses with two nimble bounds.

As the lariats were loosened and the two boys dashed off down the rocky path the Indians, with a yell, started in pursuit.

They were soon mounted, and away they went.

Taking the lead, Buck kept along the path at a breakneck pace, with his companion close behind. The night was very dark, but so long as he heard the Indians clattering in his rear he knew that this path was safe enough for the horses.

All at once it took a sharp turn, at a place where it broadened, with great masses of rock, fantastically heaped upon each other, on both sides.

"We don't know the way, and a cat couldn't hardly tell where it was going on such a dark night!" cried Tom.

"We'll play those varmints a trick," answered Buck. "We'll git off the horses, and hide 'mongst the rocks, till they go by. A smart crack with the lariats will then send the horses rattling on, as if Old Nick was after 'em!"

The two boys stopped the horses and dismounted. Then, lashing them furiously, they set them to speeding on along the rocky path.

The Indians were too far in the rear to perceive, on so dark a night, that no person was on the animals.

Buck now crept into a hollow, and Tom was soon by his side.

Not three minutes passed, ere the whooping Indians went dashing by, looking, in the gloom, like so many dusky fiends flying through the air.

"Good!" said Buck, as the rattling hoofs died away in the distance. "I wonder ef the niggers took our rifles with 'em. I looked sharp as they went past, but I'm pretty shore I saw nothing of the rifles."

As he spoke he crept out of the hollow.

"I'm going back whar we come from, to look fur our pieces," he continued.

"And I'll go with you," said Tom.

The boys hurried up the path, and, in a short time the light of the fire guided them to their destination.

They crept toward it, keeping themselves screened by a rock, but they quickly perceived that none of the Indians had been left there.

"Hyar's whar I saw 'em put our rifles," said Buck, as he moved toward a hollow, under a rock—"and hyar they are, shore enough," he joyfully added, as he drew forth the weapons, with the ammunition-pouches. "The niggers were in such a hurry to capture us that they didn't stop to take the pieces with 'em, thinking they'd soon be back with us."

"Which way shall we go, now?" inquired Tom, as each boy took the rifle belonging to him and slung his pouch.

"I'm a little puzzled in the dark," said Buck, "but we'll keep on this way," he added, pursuing a course opposite to that the Indians had followed.

The lads journeyed on for hours ere they thought of halting for rest.

They were now in a deep gulch, wrapped in impenetrable gloom, with towering walls of rock rising on each side of them.

After resting a moment, Buck climbed one of the rocks, and looked about him.

In the distance, he beheld several twinkling lights.

"Did you see anything?" inquired Tom, when he came down.

"Yes, I saw Bannack!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE.

THE boys were soon continuing their way, but it was almost dawn ere they reached the settlement of Bannack—a city of log huts, between the lofty mountains.

Most of these huts appeared to be deserted, but now and then the two would pass some which were inhabited.

Occasionally they met with miners single and in groups, wearing felt hats, hunting-shirts and heavy boots. Some of them were fierce, desperate-looking fellows, and all were armed with knives and pistols. At length Buck reached a hut a little detached from the others.

"Hyar we are," he said.

He took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door.

Two windows in the sides showed a room about eleven feet square. There was a mattress on a rude bedstead in one corner, and there were two chairs and a table.

"Fust thing we'll hev breakfast—then we'll take a good squar' nap," said Buck.

There was a rude fire-place in one side of the apartment, with some fagots heaped near it.

Buck had soon prepared some coffee, and with venison and the remnants of corn meal cake in their possession, the boys made a tolerable repast.

They then stretched themselves upon the mattress, where they soon fell asleep.

Next day the two scoured the city from one end to the other, making inquiries from miners and from the few hotel-keepers in the place about Tom's father. Nobody, however, could give them the least information about him, nor had any of them ever heard of the white "magician" or the medicine-man of whom the Snakes had spoken.

"You kin be shore your father was never hyar," said Buck. "Some of these miners have been hyar fur ten years, and they'd hev been likely to hev heard the name, had he been in these diggings."

"But I should think they would have heard of the white 'magician'."

"No, the miners may never hev heard any Injun mention it, and even ef they had, they'd hev taken no interest in anything of that sort, and would soon hev forgotten it."

Remaining a week at Bannack to rest and recruit, the boys having stocked their wallets and provided themselves with knives and pistols, in place of those taken from them by the Indians, started to continue their search.

When he spoke of the magician, the Indian chief had pointed far away to the north and east, and in that direction the twain proceeded.

They finally reached Virginia City—another mining settlement, where their inquiries were still unsuccessful.

After halting here for a few days, Tom procured a small but strong coil of rope, which he thought might be useful among steep and difficult rocks. The boys then kept on, crossing the bridge over Jefferson river, after which, having passed many settlers' huts, they reached a wild, lonely region, where no habitations were in sight.

They were now in the very heart of the Rocky Mountains, which towered around them, peak upon peak, their snowy summits lost among the clouds.

Buck continued to give Tom shooting instructions, and the lad steadily improved. When they had ex-

hausted the stock of provisions they had brought with them from the two settlements, their rifles afforded them a constant supply of deer's meat, wild pigeons, etc., so that there was no danger of their suffering from hunger while they had their weapons and a good stock of ammunition.

"Thar's a wild duck, and *thar's a pigeon*," said Buck, one morning, pointing in opposite directions. "I'll fetch the duck and you kin see ef you kin take the pigeon."

Both boys raising their rifles fired at the birds. The duck dropped dead on a shelf of rock a few yards off, the other wounded, wheeling about a moment, fell into a deep valley among the rocks, ahead.

"I'll go and get it," cried Tom.

"And I'll be getting this one ready for a roast, while you're gone," said Buck.

Tom climbing over the many jagged rocks ahead of him, finally reached the edge of the valley, in which he saw his bird, now dead. He scrambled down to it, and had picked it up, when he heard a grunt behind him.

He turned, to behold a young Indian of fifteen or sixteen before him.

The savage was naked, with the exception of a piece of buffalo-skin about his middle. His face was almost as dark as a mulatto's and he wore a hideous head-dress of feathers, which drooped over his forehead, almost concealing his fierce eyes.

"Ugh! no want to hurt young pale-face," he said, "but pale-face got good rifle. Wahnook burst his, the other day. Would like have this one," and he pointed to Tom's piece, which the boy now regretted he had not reloaded, after shooting the bird.

"It is not for sale," he answered.

"No want to buy it. Must take it!"

"I don't think you will," said Tom.

The Indian loosened a tomahawk from his girdle.

"If not give rifle, take scalp," he said, threateningly raising the weapon.

The boy clubbed his rifle, and aimed a blow at the Indian's head, but the savage dodged it nimbly, and stepping forward, he would, the next moment have cloven the lad's skull, had not an active form sprung upon him from behind, and hurled him down upon his back.

He lay motionless as if dead, for the back part of his head had struck a rock with force enough to stun him.

"Thar you are—a thieving Crow!" said Buck, for he it was who had thus opportunely come to the assistance of his friend. "Lucky I tuck a notion to follow you, Tom, arter you went, or you'd hev been gone under, before now. Jest as I got to the top of the valley, I saw this varmint start up from behind a rock, and sneak after you. We'll keep him for a hostage. You kin be sartin thar's more of his tribe near hyar, and so he'll be of use to us."

"In what way?"

"Ef we're troubled by t'others, I'll point 'Fire-death' at his head, and threaten to put a bullet through him, unless they leave us alone."

"Will he go with us?"

"Yes; thar'll be no diffiklty about that."

So saying the young trapper took some strong pieces of rope from his wallet, and turning the savage over, made his wrists fast behind his back.

The boy, grunting, at that moment came to.

He glared wildly at his two captors before he could seem to collect his scattered thoughts.

"Let up," said Buck.

"Ugh!" ejaculated the Indian, shrugging his shoulders, on perceiving that his wrists were tied. "What you want Wahnook to do? Why you tie Wahnook's hands? He no want to hurt pale-face—only make believe."

"That you're an infarnal liar, thar kin be no question. Come, get up, and then I'll tell you what I want of you."

The Indian staggered to his feet. He strove to control the expression of his face, but there was a

look of hatred in his glittering black eyes as he looked from one to the other of the boys.

"Better let Wahnook go," he said. "Plenty Wahnook's people close by. If let go, he will see that they no hurt boys; if not let go, they quick scalp!"

"Why, that's the very reason we want you with us! It is that we kin make shore of having no trouble with your people. Ef they offer to molest us, we'll blow out your brains! Come!"

Placing themselves on each side of the young savage, the two friends compelled him to accompany them.

They soon reached a flat rock, where, with some sticks, gathered from a mass of dry brushwood, near by, Burke made a fire.

Then he plucked and prepared the two birds.

He roasted them on a spit, and the boys had breakfast, which they shared with their captive, whom, on account of his hands being tied, they were obliged to feed as if he were a baby.

The meal being finished, the three were ready to continue their journey.

"Wahnook," said Buck, "I hev a good offer to make to you. Although you've acted like a mean skunk, ef you'll guide us to the 'White Magician,' I'll see that you're made a present of a brand new rifle—to say nothing of what you may get from the magician himself."

"White magic-man?"

"Yes; I kin sw'ar you've heard on him."

"It is true; but Wahnook could not take the white boys there, for the Indians in those mountains are his foes. Besides, the magic-man would not thank Wahnook for showing the boys where he lives. He does not want to see white people."

"Yes he does—in this case. My friend hyar, whom you were going to kill, is his son."

Wahnook started, but the next moment he regained his composure.

It was evident he thought Buck had lied to him.

"Wahnook will show boys the way—but where is the rifle you promise him?"

"You shall hev it, squar' on the nail, soon as some friends I expect, meet me, a few weeks from now at Bannack."

The young Indian apparently was satisfied.

"It is good; but the way is long. Better unfasten arms, so can better show the way."

"No, thank you. I've no notion of your giving us the slip. You kin bet I know something of Injun natur'."

The savage gave a dissatisfied sort of grunt.

"Come, then; Wahnook show the way," he said.

Allowing him to keep ahead, the boys followed.

The dusky guide swiftly pursued a zig-zag path among the mountains.

Buck kept a wary eye about him.

All at once, as they were passing a lofty hight covered with pines, the sharp peal of a rifle was heard, and a bullet passed within an inch of Tom's fore-head.

"Treach'rous varmint!" cried the young trapper, as he and Tom ran up to him, and the former pointed his pistol at his head. "You've tried to lead us into a hornet's nest. The pine thicket is full of your cussed people. Make a sign to 'em not to attempt your rescue, or I sw'ar I'll put a bullet through you!"

The Indian boy waved his head backward toward the thicket, thus trying to give the desired signal; but scarcely had he done so, when there was a yell, and the rocks all around the trio were alive with dusky foes, some armed with bows and arrows and some with rifles!

These would have been discharged at the white boys had not their enemies perceived that the young trapper had his hand on the trigger of his rifle, the muzzle of which almost touched the Crow's temple.

The Indians knew what this meant, and not a rifle was fired or an arrow discharged.

The savages, however, kept narrowing the circle around the three.

"Keep whar you are!" shouted Buck to them. "Ef you come a foot closer it's all up with your man's cakes!"

At this the savages stood motionless.

"Fire!" shouted the Indian boy. "Wahnook not 'fraid to die! He have revenge, and that will be good, even if he lose his life!"

This, however, did not suit the savages, who would rather show their skill and cunning by getting possession of the captive without causing his death.

Buck now compelled Wahnook to go with him and Tom to a high, rocky ridge, which would afford him a good view of his foes.

For some time the Indians seemed to be holding a consultation. Before the shades of night closed in about the place not one of the savage party was in sight.

At dark the two boys suddenly missed Wahnook.

CHAPTER V.

THE RAFT.

"HELLO!" cried Buck. "I had my eye on him, jest a moment since, and now ef he hasn't slipped away from us like a greased pig's tail."

As he spoke he leaned over the edge of a declivity that shelved smoothly down from the rock on which the boys stood.

An object, looking in the gloom like the outline of a ball, was visible, some yards below, rolling down the descent.

"Thar he is—thar he goes!" cried the lad. "We've lost him, shore enough!"

"Why don't you fire at him?" inquired Tom.

"That wouldn't do. It would bring all the other varmints hyar in no time. They'd know what was up. The sooner we get out of this the better!"

He led the way over a mass of jagged rocks, looking keenly about him as he went. Right ahead he suddenly beheld the outline of an Indian, seated on the edge of a precipice. His back was toward the boys, but they expected every moment, that he would turn his head, and see them.

Buck, crouching on his hands and knees, crept swiftly forward.

Just then the Indian turned, and saw him. With a wild whoop and his tomahawk uplifted, he sprung at the young trapper.

Tom had already raised his rifle to fire, when he saw the savage, who had made a blow at the crouching boy, fall over the latter as he leaped forward like a frog.

Buck had seized him by the leg, and pulled it from under him, when with a horrid yell, away went the Crow, falling sideways over the edge of the precipice.

"Thar, I've finished his 'taters fur him!" said Buck, as he rose. "Glad you didn't fire, as that would have showed the rest of the niggers, who, I now feel shore, ain't far off, jest whar we are."

"Will we escape them as it is?"

"We kin try—thar's nothing shore in this world. Come on!"

Tom followed his guide, who now led him a swift race over the rocks, down into hollows, and along zig-zag paths, between the rugged masses.

At last, when they had proceeded for hours, he paused.

"Thar, I reckon we've got a good piece ahead of the varmints. Hyar we'll make a 'lounge,' keeping a lookout until morning."

Taking turns at keeping watch, that each might obtain sleep, the boys finally saw the morning light creep around them.

They could as yet see nothing of their foes. Far below them stretched a vast plain, watered here and there by a creek or river at long distances from each other, and thinly bordered by willows and cottonwood. Away to the north, Tom pointed out

a thin column of smoke, rising from among the stupendous crags that towered in that direction.

"Indians?" inquired the boy.

"I'm not shore. Wait a bit."

He climbed to the summit of a lofty rock that loomed up from the place where the two stood.

Tom watching him, saw him beckoning to him, and he was soon by his side.

"It's no Injuns!" cried Buck. "Shore as you're alive, thar's a house tharaway, whar that smoke comes from."

"A house?"

"Yes, a house built of stone, I reckin—not a very big one, but a house fur all that. You kin jest see one side of the wall and the chimney."

Tom was soon able to make out the habitation.

"Glory!" he cried. "Do you know, Buck, I feel as if my father is there!"

"Don't be too shore. It does look, though, as ef that must be the home of the 'magician' the Injuns hev told us about."

"You can bet your bottom dollar it is!" cried Tom. "Come! let's lose no time in getting there."

"You kin make up your mind that it's some days' journey to that place," said Buck. "It's further off than it looks, to say nothing of the savages who are to dispute our getting thar. Besides, it'll be a diffikilt place to find."

"We can carefully take the bearings of it from here."

"That we kin do, but things'll look mou'ty diff'rent when we git to that part of the mountains. You kin see that the house is built among crags, which will be hard ef not onpossible to climb. Thar they are, all steep, 'thout any foothold, so far as I kin see, and how any human critter got up thar and built that house whar it is beats me!"

"There must be a way to it, of course, unless this 'magician' has wings."

"Sart'intly; but the thing is to *find* that way."

"You'll help me look for it?"

"I'll stick to you like a live gum-tree. The fust thing now is to hev breakfast."

Their frugal repast was soon finished, and the boys were about to descend to the plain, which would afford them smooth traveling, instead of continuing along the mountains from where they were, when Buck suddenly pulled Tom down behind the ledge near which the two stood.

"What is it?" inquired the boy.

"Injuns! Thar they are—them infarnal Crows, again, shore as you're alive!"

He pointed down at the very base of the elevation, visible through an opening in the ledge, and Tom saw a file of Indians emerging from a gully that pierced a part of the mountain.

"They are looking up! I think I can make out Wahnook. Can it be that they have seen us, and know we are here?"

"I reckin not, but they are looking fur us. Thar's Wahnook large as life. I hope to git squar' with that chap some of these days."

There were about twenty Indians in all. Having taken a careful survey of the mountain crags, they moved on a short distance, scanning the ground for the boys' trail.

"Glad we didn't git the start on 'em," said Buck. "Ef we had, they'd hev tracked us shore."

The Crows, having carefully searched the ground, to discover no trail, now paused as if in consultation. Not until sundown did they leave this place, when they moved to the base of the mountains, where the chain of rugged elevations curved inward, as if concluding that their young foes were to be sought for among the rocky bights. At the base, however, they again paused, most of them remaining on the plain, while they sent scouts among the rugged hills to search for the fugitives.

"We must lose no time," said Buck. "Those niggers will hang about hyar fur days. Thar's our way!"

And he pointed at a broad stream which glided past one side of the elevation on which he stood.

This stream was bordered with willows and cottonwoods.

Now and then a drifting tree was borne along by the current.

"The wind last night was high," said Buck, "and it must have blown down some of the trees, which accounts for their drifting thar. We must take advantage of it and make use of some on 'em this afternoon."

"How?"

"Come, I'll show you."

They were soon on the shore of the stream, hidden here from the Indians, who were collected, as stated, in the curve of the mountain-chain on the other side.

Buck contrived to pull several of the floating trees to the bank. He lashed them together and covered them with willow branches, so that the whole mass looked like one single tree, whose boughs had been broken and disarranged by the late gale.

He gave his directions to Tom, and the boys waded out and got hold of one of the tree-trunks. Placing their rifles, their other weapons, their wallets, etc., upon the raft they pushed it out into the stream, and, concealed by the branches, they drifted along.

With their legs, as they drifted, the two guided their novel craft whenever it showed a tendency to whirl shoreward, and thus they were soon passing the place opposite to where the Crows were collected.

Some of the Indians were seated on the ground—others were carelessly walking to and fro, now and then gazing toward the stream.

Through interstices among the branches the boys could see them plainly, and to their dismay they beheld Wahnook, who had been looking at the floating tree, saunter toward the bank with his gaze still fixed upon it.

"It cannot be he has seen us!" said Tom.

"No," answered the young trapper; "ef he had, you'd see the whole kit on 'em coming this way."

Wahnook soon reached the bank.

The boys knew that he did not see them, and they were hoping to drift safely past, when the young Indian, reaching over, caught at a branch of the floating mass, and, pulling on it, drew the raft toward the shore.

Natural as it had looked a short distance off, it was plain that the Indian now noticed its artful construction, and as he leaned over, peering among the branches, he caught sight of Tom's head protruding over the edge of the further side of the floating mass.

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, but, ere he could give the alarm to his people in the distance, or could hurl the tomahawk, which he had lifted, toward Temple, Buck sprung up from under the water, at his feet, and buried his knife to the hilt in his heart.

So swift and sure was the blow that the young Indian, without a groan, fell headlong into the stream!

CHAPTER VI.

A PERILOUS HIDING-PLACE.

BUCK, on perceiving that Wahnook would not fail to discover the *raft-ruse* had swum under the floating trunks, and thus had come up on the other side, and in time to save the life of his friend.

There were a few shrubs on the bank, partially screening the youth when he fell into the stream, from his people beyond.

The keen-eyed savages might, however, have obtained a glimpse of him, or might have heard the splash he made in striking the water.

Buck knew there was no time to lose, so, again diving, he swam back beneath the surface, and came up alongside of Temple.

Meanwhile the raft was again gliding swiftly forward with the full force of the current.

"You were just in time," said Tom. "How did you know that imp would see me with so many branches between him and me?"

"Those fellows see like cats. They kin make out things whar a white man wouldn't see shucks."

"Hark!" said Tom.

A fierce yell was heard. Peering through small interstices among the leaves, the lads could discern the forms of some of the Indians on the shore, looking at a few drops of blood left by Wahnook on the green bank!

"I don't think they saw him fall," said Buck, "but, as he didn't come back, they scent mischief! Thar! I thought so," he added. "They're looking at the raft, and pointing at it; they'll soon be after us!"

Even as he spoke several of the Indians started swiftly along the bank, and were soon opposite to the drifting trees. That the floating mass was in some way connected with the disappearance of the boy, they seemed to suspect, but as it was now about dusk, they were unable to see the lads on the other side, screened by the thick branches.

The stream was here too wide for them to reach the raft without swimming to it. A couple of them, therefore, plunged into the water, and struck out for it. Tom and his companion saw them get upon the raft, and creep toward them.

To attack the two would have been folly, under the circumstances, for the comrades of the savages were keeping up with the raft, along the bank, and would have heard any scuffle.

"Can't we get under the logs, and keep our mouths turned up to the openings between them, so we can breathe?" whispered Tom. "In that way we could keep from being seen, and these people would then go away, thinking no one was here."

The rustling made by the two Indians among the branches hindered their hearing the whisper.

"We mou't do it," said Buck, "ef we hadn't left our rifles 'mong the branches near us to keep dry. They'd be shore to see them!"

"That's so. I didn't think of that. But what are we to do?"

"Stay whar you are, and wait fur me," said Buck, as he drew his knife.

Diving under the two logs nearest to them, he, with a few blows upon the thongs holding them together, cut them loose.

Thus the other trunks, which still held together, were separated from those to which the boys clung.

"All right," whispered Buck. "Now the varmints kin not git to us, as we're in sep'rate boats."

In fact the two savages who had not yet reached this part of the raft, were carried away from it; for the young trapper now braced his feet against some sunken rocks, and retarded the drift for several moments. By this time the two Indians had been borne past a small jutting point of land.

The boys, by pushing with their legs, contrived to bring the remnant of the raft to which they clung, against this point.

Seizing their rifles, they crouched among some bushes, and allowed the two trunks to drift on down the stream.

The gloom of night enabled them to do this without being seen by their foes.

"Which way, now?" whispered Tom.

"We're now on t'other side of stream from those varmints," said Buck. "As we don't want to leave any tracks, we must take to the water again."

"We have no raft, now."

"No, but on this side, close to the shore, the water is shallow enough for wading."

Waiting until the Indians on the opposite bank were some distance below them, the boys waded alongshore.

"Thar you are; now we'll wait for 'em to pass 'other way," said Buck, at last.

He drew Tom down by his side, in an earth-hollow in the bank.

"Hyar they come," he whispered. Indistinct forms were now seen, moving along on the other side.

As soon as they were out of sight, the lads with Buck leading, swam across to the opposite shore, each with his rifle, pistols and ammunition held above him to keep dry. They used one hand for this purpose, while they contrived to keep themselves up with the other.

"Hyar we are, across," said Buck, as they stepped out on the opposite bank, "and now for the mountains, whar we kin keep out of sight better than on the plains."

"But we will leave tracks."

Buck pointed to a narrow creek, which Tom had not noticed, leading off toward the mountains.

"By keeping in this, we'll show no tracks."

The lads entered the creek, which was up to their knees, and waded on.

A thin sprinkling of cottonwoods and willows became thicker as they proceeded, and as they drew nearer to the mountains, they found themselves in a dense thicket.

"Hark!" said Tom, suddenly.

The sound of approaching feet was heard. Dark forms were indistinctly seen through the darkness, with hundreds of wild, fierce eyes.

"Coyotes!" said Buck.

"They'll not molest us," said Tom, indifferently.

"Don't you be too sure of that. A couple of shots from our rifles would scatter the critters, but we don't want to draw the *Injuns* this way with the noise, and so the animiles will hev things pretty much their own way."

The numbers of the coyotes kept increasing. On both shores of the creek they hemmed in the lads, following them, howling and snarling, and now and then stretching their fanged jaws toward them, as if to seize them.

At length one bolder than the rest sprung at Tom's throat.

He did not see it coming, but Buck, whose keen gaze had been at work through the darkness, saw the dim outline, and with one blow from his rifle-stock, he laid the animal dead at his feet.

All at once every coyote retreated. The outlines of their dark forms were for an instant seen, as they scampered over the plain and then disappeared.

"Your killing one seems to have frightened all," said Tom.

"It wasn't that made 'em go!"

"What then?"

"Injuns," answered Buck.

"Where?"

"The Crows are looking for us. They knew the coyotes were not making so much noise for nothing. The animals hev scented 'em, and hev gone off."

"I cannot see nor hear them yet."

"You soon will, ef we stay hyar, which this child ain't going to do. The varmints, I take it, are all around us. We are sarcumvented, but the raskils won't get the best of us, for all that."

"How do you know they are around us?"

"By the coyotes. Hyar they come scampering back in t'other direction again."

"Which way shall we go now?"

"Thar," said Buck, pointing upward at the thick branches of a large willow overhanging the creek, "thar's whar we'll make a 'lounge' fur the present, till thar's more light on the subject."

The boys climbed into the tree and soon were upon a broad bough among the upper branches. So deep was the gloom in this thicket that they could not now see the coyotes which they could hear scampering over the ground.

Not ten minutes had passed when the dusky outlines of human forms were seen moving along through the shadows of the thicket.

"Hyar they are—the Crow niggers," whispered Buck. "Shouldn't wonder ef they've found the body of Wahnook and by putting this and that together, they reckin we are somewhar in this thicket."

For some time the outlines of the savage forms were observed passing and repassing near the tree in which the boys were seated.

At length they disappeared, and neither Indians nor coyotes now were seen or heard.

"Hadn't we better get down and keep on toward the mountains? We will, I think, strike them near the place where the 'magician' lives."

"We'd be some miles from him, you kin bet, but we'll hev to stay hyar fer awhile, anyway. The redskins are lying in wait for us, I kin almost sw'ar, not far off. We'll hev to keep whar we are till morning, at least."

Throughout the night the boys took turns at watching and each thus obtained some sleep.

At dawn both were awake. About two miles ahead of them, they could see the peaks of the mountains looming up above the trees on the further edge of the thicket.

"I see nothing of the Indians," said Tom, as he carefully looked about him.

Buck smiled.

"The varmints are all around us," he said. "We'll have to stay in the tree."

"Where are they?" inquired Tom.

As he spoke what he had taken merely for the feathers of birds, projecting over clumps of shrubbery, at various points in the woods, arose, showing that they were the head-dresses of hideous faces beneath.

Again the savages scoured the thicket, peering round them in all directions, but they failed to discover the boys.

At last they moved off, disappearing in the shrubbery, on different sides of the woods.

"Hark! what noise is that?" asked Tom, suddenly, just as the lads had partaken of a frugal repast from their wallets.

For the first time since their meeting Tom noticed an expression like that of fear on the face of his companion.

"Thunder!" muttered the young trapper. "We're in diffikilt, now. The mean varmints hev set the woods on fire!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAGE OF FIRE.

MANY of the trees in the woods were dry and dead, and there were piles of brush here and there, scattered about the ground where branches had fallen from time to time.

The lads could hear the crackling of the flames, and could see the fire surrounding them like a lurid ring. The smoke also rising in thick clouds, was blown into their faces, almost suffocating them.

"What can we do?" said Tom, as the wind wafted the flames nearer to the tree, every moment.

"Thar's the question," answered Buck. "Ef we shin down the tree, the niggers mou't see us—ef we stay whar we are, we'll make roasted meat fur the coyotes!"

"I'm afraid it's all up with us," cried Tom.

"You sartintly will never find your father, at this rate," said Buck.

He looked carefully around him—especially along the bank of the creek.

All at once his eyes lighted up.

"Perhaps thar's a chance fur us," he said, pointing to an opening in the bank, not far off, near the edge of the water. "Ef we kin only git down from hyar without being seen by the pesky varmints."

Waiting until the smoke, which had subsided a little, was again blown about the tree in a thick cloud, Buck said to his companion: "Now is our time!"

Tom followed him as he descended quickly from

the tree, and the two lads were soon in the creek, making for the opening in the bank.

This was found to be just large enough for them to crawl through, and they now found themselves in a sort of earth-cave, up to their waists in water.

"We are safe enough here," said Tom.

"Yes, ef a tree doesn't fall on the bank above, and cause the earth to cave in on us."

Peering about him, he discovered another hole in one side of the hollow.

"Thar's the work of coyotes," he said. "The critters are famous fur burrowing in the ground."

Looking through the opening, he gave utterance to a half-suppressed ejaculation.

"Hyar's a deep pit," he said. "The animiles didn't care to make the'r quarters thar. The earth must have caved in, jest as they got through the hole."

"Shall we go in?"

"I don't think we kin do better. The branches are beginning to fall pretty lively above us, and we'll have to find shelter."

He got through the hole and slid down into the pit, which was about twelve feet deep.

Tom followed.

"It is close and damp down here," he said. "How long will we have to stay here?"

"The Lord only knows. As you kin see, it was easy enough to git *down* hyar, but how we are ever to git *up* again beats me!"

In fact, so steep and crumbly was the earth-wall that an ascent seemed impossible.

Above them the boys could hear the crackling and roaring of the flames, with which was soon mingled the crash of falling branches. The roof of the pit partly caved in, and a burning branch descended toward them. They avoided it by stepping to one side. It filled the pit with smoke, and, for several minutes, they thought they would smother to death. Finally, however, they put out the fire by throwing masses of earth upon it.

All day long the fire raged above them.

Not until next morning did they think of venturing from their retreat.

"How are we to get out?" inquired Tom. "Have you thought of any way?"

Buck looked at the branch which had fallen into the pit on the day before.

"This mou't help us," he said.

He placed it on end against the side of the pit. It was about six feet long, and therefore reached within six feet of the opening above.

Climbing it, he endeavored to keep on to the aperture. He had nearly reached it when, all at once, the hideous painted face of an Indian appeared there!

"Ugh!" grunted the savage, and, as quick as thought, he hurled his tomahawk at the boy. The weapon, owing to the narrowness of the opening, hit the top of it, and the force of the blow was so deadened that, when it struck Buck's head, he was only scratched by it.

Pulling his pistol from his belt, he leveled it at the head of the Indian, but, as he fired, the savage dropped backward, thus avoiding the bullet.

When Buck looked through the opening he was gone!

"Come, Tom, we must make quick tracks from hyar!" he shouted to his companion. "That varmint wasn't alone. You kin bet thar's plenty more near him."

Tom soon gained the side of his friend.

The two crawled through the opening in the bank and looked around them.

They could see nothing of the savage who had retreated, but they doubted not that he and others lay in ambush for them, not far off.

All the dry wood in the thicket had been burned, and even the green trees were so badly scorched and injured that many of them looked as if ready to fall.

Suddenly Buck seized Tom's arm and drew him back close under the shelter of the bank.

He had scarcely done so when the report of several rifles was heard, and the whizzing of bullets sounded close to the boys' ears.

"Thar they are!" said the young trapper, pointing to a group of Crows who had sprung up from behind some fallen timber not forty yards off. "Now, Tom, we'll give 'em all we kin before they captur' us!"

Both boys held their pieces in readiness, and, taking aim at the Crows, Buck was about to fire, when the sharp crack of a rifle, followed by whoops and yells was heard behind the band, as a large party of savages broke cover and rushed toward them.

"The Blackfeet, by jingo!" cried Buck, as he lowered his piece. "Save your fodder (ammunition), Tom. All we hav to do now is to stand byar and watch the fun!"

Taken by surprise by their enemies, the Crows fled in every direction, some of them, however, showing fight as they retreated.

The crack of rifles and the yells of the combatants made fearful din.

Tom could not help shuddering when he saw some of the Crows who were captured tomahawked and scalped by their enemies.

The strife was of brief duration as the Blackfeet greatly outnumbered their foes, and the boys now saw some of them approaching.

"They look as fierce as the others," said Tom. "Will they not harm us?"

"They're bad varmints, but I hav hopes that they'll not trouble us."

As they had been seen, the boys thought it best to get out of the creek upon the bank.

The foremost of the Blackfeet was a tall person, wearing a dirty blanket about his loins, and armed with a good rifle.

"Where come from? What do here?" he inquired of the lads.

"We've come in search of this boy's father," said Buck, pointing to his companion.

"Why look for fadder, here? Think Blackfeet got pris'ner?"

"No, nor kin any mortil man, ef I'm not mistook, make prisoner of the White Magician. That person is this boy's father."

For an instant a look as of respect passed over the Indian's face; then his visage became as hard and immobile as at first.

"Boy got fork tongue! Magic-man no got son. Magic-man tell Blackfoot not let any white people come near him! Tell Blackfoot not harm white men, but not let come. Blackfoot do as magic-man say; he not hurt the boys! They can go, but they must not try to reach him!"

"You have seen him, then?" said Tom.

"It is true. Black Thunder has seen the great magic-man, and has heard him say that he has no sons—no daughters to look for him. That is why Black Thunder knows that the boy has said what was not true."

Tom looked much discouraged.

If the Indian could be relied on, his statement seemed to prove that the mountain wizard was not Temple's father, after all!

"What sort of a chap is this great magic-man?" inquired Buck.

"Very great," answered Black Thunder. "Him have glass gun, through which Indian can see happy hunting-ground! Him do many great things."

"And yonder is his home—is it not?" inquired Tom, pointing to the distant mountain peak, where he had seen the stone house, and from which a column of smoke was now rising.

"It is true! but never white boy must go there. Black Thunder not let go there, even if white boy could find, but he *never* find!"

"What do you mean?"

"The path leading to the magic-man's home, is

known only to him and to the Blackfeet, near these mountains!" was the reply.

CHAPTER VII

A STRANGE RESCUER.

"WELL, at any rate, we'll go among the mountains to look fur game," said Buck. "Come on, Tom."

"It is well," said Black Thunder; "but if the Indians find you go too near the magic-man's home, he make you go back."

The base of the mountains was not more than half a mile distant.

The lads, having crossed a rapid stream lying in their way, finally reached it.

They were soon climbing up among the cliffs.

At last they paused on a lofty ledge. Looking around them, not an Indian was to be seen.

Black Thunder, as he had promised, had permitted the boys to go on their way unmolested.

"We cannot see the magician's hut from here," remarked Tom.

"No; it's a chance ef we ever see it again, unless we find the secret path of which Black Thunder spoke. According to what he said, though, the magic-man cannot be your father, after all."

"May not the Indian have misunderstood this magician?"

"No; but I've found that an Injun will sometimes tell whopping lies, which may be the case now. P'r'aps he never heard the magician say what he has told us."

"This, then, brightens things up a little," said Tom. "I was awfully down-hearted when I heard him say what he did. There are no Indians now to watch us. Let us go in the direction where we saw the stone-house, and see if we cannot 'spot' that secret path."

"You kin be shore we'll be seen by the red-skins soon, even if we are not now. But I don't care; I've sworn to stick by you and help you hunt for your father, and I'll keep my word. First, though, we'd better take a nap to recruit."

They found a hollow, where they lay down and enjoyed a good sleep.

They awoke hungry, and made a meal of some of the contents of their wallets.

Then they kept on among the wild thickets and precipices of the mountains, endeavoring to shape from memory their course toward the habitation they had seen.

Toward nightfall they reached the edge of a deep valley. Beyond, piled one above the other, in fantastic confusion, rose enormous peaks and crags.

From among the latter Tom saw a light smoke ascending.

"Good! We've struck it!" he cried. "After all, the rocks between us and that smoke don't look so hard to climb over."

"Don't count yer game before it's bagged," said Buck. "That smoke mou't not come from the house, after all."

"Yes—I feel sure it does!" cried Tom, hopefully.

The two with some difficulty, after several hours' toil, reached and climbed the rock which separated them from the spot whence the smoke arose.

Three wild-looking beings—Indians—were seated round a fire, on a flat rock.

They showed no emotion whatever—in fact, hardly seemed to notice the boys, who recognized them as from the same party they had met in the morning with Black Thunder.

The lads were about to move on, when the savages arose, and one motioned back the young adventurers.

"Not mus' go fudder!" he said. "Go dis way—dat way," he said, pointing east and west; "but not go dere."

The lads exchanged significant glances. They now felt pretty sure they had taken the right direc-

tion, and that they were not so very far from the "magician's" home.

The desire of the Blackfoot to turn them off on some other course seemed to prove this.

"Come!" said Buck to Tom.

He led the way toward the east until they were between lofty rocks, out of sight of the Indians.

"Don't you think we're close on the place we are searching for?" asked Tom.

"It looks like it," said the other, "and that may be no secret path, after all, though I reckon it's likely, as this 'magician,' ef fur any reason he didn't want to hav white people disturb him, would pick out some place dislikilt to git to."

"Pity we've got to wait till morning before we do anything. We can't see to move about now that it's pitch dark."

"No, but we can *feel* our way, and the dark's all the better, as the Injuns won't see us."

"How can we tell which way to go?"

Buck pointed to a light—a dim, trembling light, far ahead and above them.

"Hello!" cried Tom joyfully, "that must come from the 'shanty' we're looking for."

"No, I don't think so, but it may come from some hut lying in the truck of the house we are trying to find. The Injuns hav forbidden our going in that direction, but I don't care fur that, ef we kin only make progress in our s'arch."

Feeling their way, they kept on.

Finally they discovered that the light came from a smoldering fire, near a crevice in a hollow rock, where two Indians lay on their backs, fast asleep.

They kept on a little further, until they suddenly felt themselves on the very edge of a frightful precipice, from which another movement forward would have precipitated them.

"We'll hav to make a 'lounge' near hyar fur the night," said Buck.

"Yes, but we'll be up sharp and early at daylight," remarked his companion, "and perhaps we'll find the secret path before the Indians can see and prevent us!"

They crept into an opening among the rugged masses and were soon asleep.

Buck was the first to awaken at dawn. He took a keen survey around him, until at length he saw a clump of shrubbery which looked as if it might conceal a secret path.

The moment Tom was awake and the boys had had breakfast, they started forward along the edge of the precipice, until, on reaching the shrubbery, they discovered that it concealed no path, but hung over the entrance of a sort of ravine.

On their right rose stupendous masses of rock, which they were about to ascend when the whiz of an arrow was heard, and the shaft passed within half an inch of Tom's temple.

Looking upward, the boys beheld a group of fierce Blackfeet, standing on a crag far above them, and motioning to them to keep back.

"The varmints must fire first and warn us after," said Buck angrily. "True we hav not heeded their warning, but what right hav they to warn us anyway?"

"They have none," said Tom. "We have as good a right to go to the 'magician' as they have."

"That's so, and you kin skin me fur a coon ef I don't do my best to sarcument 'em, and ef he's to be got at, we'll git thar yet."

As he spoke he moved, followed by his friend, among some rocks, which led round to the other side of the height occupied by the Indians.

Climbing a few of these elevations, they gained a rugged platform, near which were piled a number of boulders small enough to be moved by a person of ordinary strength. At that moment they heard a wild whoop beneath them, and beheld about thirty Indians, among whom they recognized Black Thunder.

The latter motioned to them to come down.

"No use; you kin beckon and beckon; but we've

got so far, and we're not going to give up our position!" shouted Buck. "We're tired of being ordered about hyar and thar by you and your red-skins!"

"If no come down, quick scalp!" shouted Black Thunder, flourishing his tomahawk.

"I reckon you'll hav a hard time to git up to us hyar," cried Buck, as he gazed around him. "Ef thar's any virtue in Firedeath, I kin keep you and your niggers from climbing these steep rocks!"

Black Thunder said something the boys could not hear to his people; then they commenced to scale the rocks.

"Keep back, or it'll be the worse for you!" shouted Buck, as he and Tom took aim with their rifles.

But the Indians, partly protected by projecting ledges, came on.

Watching his chance, Buck fired at the arm of a savage which was exposed.

The Indian let go his hold, and rolled down to the base of the rock, the blood streaming from the wounded arm.

"Wouldn't it be best to roll these boulders down on them?" said Tom. "They'd break the rock shelves that protect the Indians, and then they'd be exposed to our fire!"

"No," said Buck. "The boulders are not heavy enough to break the rock. But we kin make a sort of fort with 'em, which'll give us a good show against the varmints!"

Working with a will, the two boys had soon piled the boulders in a semicircle, breast-high, thus forming a shelter, from behind which they hoped to be able to keep the savages at bay. By the time they had completed the barricade, however, not an Indian was to be seen.

"What can have become of them?" said Tom.

Buck looked up uneasily at the top of a rock that rose behind them.

"I'm thinking the niggers are coming up on the other side of that rock," he said.

He climbed to the summit of the elevation, and looking down, perceived that his conjecture was right.

The savages were rapidly coming up on that side.

He motioned to Tom, who soon joined him, and now from their position the boys fired at their foes. Such of the latter as had rifles shot back at them; but, owing to their position, the lads, partly sheltered by a ridge, were not touched either by bullet or arrow.

The Indians, crouching as they came, in hollow and behind protruding shelves, could not be reached, and were soon within a few yards of the top of the rock.

At the same moment the boys heard a scrambling noise behind them, and turning, they discovered that other savages had ascended on that side, had climbed over the barricade they had put up, and were now close to the summit of the rock.

Before the lads, who had just fired, could reload, the party reached the top of the elevation, and surrounded them.

Half a dozen tomahawks were raised above their heads, and they believed that their fate was sealed.

At that critical instant, while the boys were anticipating speedy death, the form of a young Indian girl appeared on a rock, opposite.

"Stop!" cried the girl, in a rich, musical voice. "No strikel. Why would you hurt the boys? Has not the 'magician' told you not to *harm* any of the whites, but only to keep them from coming this way?"

At these words every tomahawk was held motionless in the air.

The sudden appearance of the speaker and her speech seemed to have produced a singular effect on the stern warriors.

The girl could not have been more than fifteen years of age, although a certain innocent, childish expression of face made her seem still younger. Her form, however, had all the rounded grace of

the woman, and her bright, black hair hung below the hollow of her back. She wore a deerskin robe, girdled about the waist with a bright belt, and her hat, a round one, made of soft, dark beaver, placed jauntily on her head, was ornamented with a red and white feather. The face of oval contour was full of pliant beauty, the features, although regular, having lively expression, and a rich color glowing through the clear, olive skin.

"Linola has spoken," cried Black Thunder, "but her voice should not be heard now. The Indian knows what he is about. The white boys have fired upon our men, and they would make trouble. They must die!"

"No! no!" shouted the girl, stamping her little foot. "It must not be! If Black Thunder kills the white boys, Linola will tell the great 'magician,' and he will punish the Blackfeet!"

"Black Thunder is not afraid," answered the chief. "He will tell the 'magician' how it was."

Linola still pleaded for the lives of the boys, but without success. All at once, she descended from the rock, but, in her place, there now appeared a white man, being so hideously deformed that he might have been taken for a ghoul from unearthly regions.

His face was long and crooked. It was twisted half-way round, was disfigured with livid scars, and his bloodshot eyes looked like two red balls of flame. His head was bowed so low and his back bent so like a bow, that he had the appearance of rolling his eyes up into his head, when looking at those to whom he spoke.

Pointing at the lads, he said, in a loud, harsh voice:

"Go away! Leave the boys alone!"

The Indians obeyed without a word. They descended the rock, and the lads saw them moving off among the rugged masses.

They turned to thank their deliverer, but he was gone!

CHAPTER IX.

THE PURSUIT.

For some moments the boys looked at each other in surprise.

"Well, sartintly, this beats me!" cried Buck.

"I never heard of anything like it," said Tom.

"Ef it had been the beauty of that young Injun gal, that had done it all," said Buck, "I mou't understand it, but sech a critter—"

"I have it!" interrupted Tom.

"Well, then, 'open your face' and blaze away!"

"That man—that deformed creature was the 'magician,' which accounts for the singular effect he had on the Indians. Of course by working on their superstition, he has gained great influence over them. You must make up your mind to that—sure pop!"

"I don't take it in—no I don't! Thar's a diffikiltty."

"What?"

"The Injuns spoke of his having a 'glass gun'—meaning a telescope, of course."

"Well?"

"How in the name of rattlesnakes, kin a chap with sech eyes look up enough to squint through a telescope? You could see that, jest to look at us, he had to roll his eyeballs almost into his head!"

"I did not think of that," said Tom. "Still I don't know but he might somehow contrive to manage it, by throwing himself fur backward!"

"I doubt it. Still, granting that he is the 'magician,' you will hev to own that he isn't your father—that is, ef a father looks anyway like his son."

"I don't know. Somehow I felt a conviction that that hideous creature was my father!"

"You did? Lord love you, no!"

"Yes. It almost takes the 'starch' out of me to think of it, and yet I saw in the man's ears a pair of

earrings, mighty like what I remember seeing in my father's, when I was a child!"

"Earrings mou't be alike! Thar's nothing in that."

"But these were curious ones. What isn't common, they were diamond-shaped."

"I've seen them all shapes. Besides I think I've heard you say your father was straight and well formed, while this chap was like a musk-ox."

"There's the trouble," said Tom—"that's what 'fetches' me! I've been wondering, if my father didn't break his back in some way, and get scarred up, as we've seen, and if that wasn't what kept him from coming back to mother! He may have made up his mind never to show himself to her on account of his being so deformed!"

Buck slowly shook his head.

"When folks are married," said he. "I reckin they're not quite so particular! Ef that chap is your father, you kin bet thar's some reason besides his being deformed that's kept him from making tracks for home."

"Well, one thing is certain. I can't rest satisfied now until I see and question this strange being, who-ever he is."

"I'm with you, thar; let's look him up."

The boys descended from the rock, and commenced their search.

Once they caught a glimpse of the deformed man as he disappeared in a narrow defile, but on reaching this, they saw no sign of him. The rocky passage described a gradual descent. Following its course a long distance, the lads found themselves in a green valley, watered by a swift stream. On the bank they now discovered the tracks of the man's moccasins, which showed that he had enormous feet.

"My father's feet were very large," said Tom. "There's another 'clincher' to make me think this person is really my father!"

"You kin tell nothing by that. Many of the chaps out this way hev big feet."

The two followed the trail until, finally, it was lost in the depths of a dark cave. There was an opening at the other end of the cave, and, passing through this, the lads found themselves at the commencement of a rocky path, leading upward among the mountains.

"The secret path!" cried Tom. "I believe we've struck it, at last!"

"Don't be too shore," said Buck, pointing upward.

They kept on until their further progress was checked by an insurmountable barrier—a steep, high rock, which could not be climbed.

While they stood looking up at it, the same Indian girl who had interfered in their behalf, emerged from between some rocks, on the right."

The boys could not hide their looks of admiration on seeing this beautiful being before them.

The girl blushed a little, and, for a moment her long lashes drooped.

"We are glad to see you again," said Tom.

"Yes, we sartintly are," echoed Buck.

"Why?" inquired Linola.

"Because—because—we want to ask you some questions," answered Tom.

"For my part," said Buck, "it's because you are jest the prettiest gal I've ever seen—you kin be shore of that."

Linola smiled, and gave her head a slight toss.

"Boy should not say that. Indian girls are not so pretty as white."

"You are an exception—that I kin sw'ar!" cried Buck. "I kin say I never saw a white gal to compar' with you!"

"I think that will do," said Tom. "Linola doesn't care for your praises; do you, Linola?"

"We speak of other things," answered the girl evasively. "What boys want here?"

"We are looking for the 'magician,'" said Tom.

"The truth is, I believe he is my father, and I want to see him to make sure."

The girl shook her head.

"Him not see you."

Tom looked puzzled.

"Do you know what his name is?"

"Indian call him Netcap—that is all."

"Will you guide us to him? or, at any rate, show us the way to his house?"

"Netcap want not to see white people. Linola promise never to show the way, and she must keep her word."

"At least, tell me if that deformed white man who saved our lives is the 'magician'?"

"Nothing have to say. Must tell nothing about the magic-man."

"You'll tell me—won't you Linola?" said Buck coaxingly.

"Why you more than other boy?" said Linola, smiling, while the black eyes shone merrily.

"Because we like each other. I'm shore of that!"

A peal of silvery laughter broke from the girl.

"You make hurry; is that the way with white boys?"

"You've hit it, thar, plum-center!"

Again Linola laughed; then with an arch glance at Tom, she darted off, disappearing among the rocks.

"Oh, Lord! what a sweet gal!" murmured Buck.

"We're after something besides girls," cried Tom, a little impatiently.

"You'll own she's a beauty?" said Buck.

"Of course she is, but you'll keep her away from us with your compliments."

"Don't you believe it; he'll come back again for some more, ef I'm not mistaken."

"You have a good opinion of yourself."

"Well, now, I reckon that's my own affair," said Buck. "Thar's no reason why gals shouldn't take to me."

"You might keep your bragging to yourself."

Buck brought down the butt of his rifle on the rock with a clang.

"See hyar, Tom!" he cried. "I see how things are—you're jealous of me, and ef you keep on we mou't quarrel, which isn't to my liking. I joined you to help you hunt for your father, because I tuck to you, but sooner than have any difficulty with you I'll jest go my own way and you kin go yours!"

Tom realized that he had been a little too hasty. The young trapper seemed to speak more in sorrow than in anger, and this touched him.

"I don't think you and I shall quarrel," he said, holding out his hand. "Here's hoping we may always be friends."

Buck accepted the proffered hand and the two boys journeyed on amicably together.

Their search for the deformed man, as well as for the secret path, was fruitless.

At night they rested under an overhanging rock and had supper.

"We'll stand watch and watch," suggested Buck.

Tom had the first watch. The new moon was shining above some of the peaks, and as the sky was clear, there was a dim light above the boy.

All at once he beheld a human being on a crag above and ahead of him.

"The deformed man!" he murmured. "I must see him and speak to him!"

He stole round to the other side of the crag, climbed over it, and descended quickly to the man's side.

In the dim light this person looked more hideous than ever. Fixing the gaze of his upward-rolling eyes on the lad he uttered a slight cry, and turning, darted off.

"Wait!" cried Tom, as he pursued him. "Tell me if you are the 'magician'—if your name is Temple?"

The fugitive answered not. Tom still pursuing, suddenly felt a loose rock on the edge of a sharply-

sloping hight give way beneath him. He went rolling down the declivity until his further course was checked by a dwarf cedar projecting from a cleft, where he lay bruised and stunned.

As he gradually recovered his senses he half rose, resolving to make an attempt to reach the top of the hight, about forty feet above him.

Just then he caught sight of a terrible object looking down upon him. It was a large black bear, whose eyes gleamed like fiery stars in the dim light.

The bear advanced a little; some loose earth and stones gave way under it, and Tom beheld the creature sliding swiftly toward him.

Mustering all his strength the boy crawled out toward the end of the slanting cedar.

The bear struck the tree, which arrested its course. It staggered to its feet, braced its fore-paws on the trunk and glared at Tom.

The latter unslung his rifle and took aim at the brute. The piece roared, but the brute tossed its head with a growl as of defiance.

The bullet had struck a branch, which turned it a little from its course, causing it to merely graze the top of the creature's head.

The monster crept out on the tree toward the lad, showing its fangs and uttering ferocious growls.

Tom drew his knife. Meanwhile the tree, which was not very firmly held in the fissure whence it grew, cracked and bent with the weight of the bear.

Looking beneath him, the boy realized that he would be thrown into a dark abyss or ravine, into which the precipice shelved should the cedar give way!

The bear came on. Tom made a blow at it with the knife, but it dashed the weapon from his grasp with one stroke of its paw, and the next moment its fangs would have been at his throat, had he not clutched a branch and swung himself from the trunk. His feet touched the rock; he braced them against a protruding ledge, and letting go the branch, threw himself forward. The bear glared down at him, and was apparently about to let itself drop upon him, when, with a crash, the tree gave way, and the animal descended into the dark abyss below!

It was a narrow escape, and feeling thankful for his deliverance, Tom now endeavored to crawl up the sloping wall of the precipice.

He reached the summit at last, and tried to find his way back to his friend. But he failed, and, lost among the intricate crags, he sunk down exhausted. He had been hurt more severely than he imagined. His head throbbed with pain; he felt faint, and was half-parched with thirst.

"What would I not give for a drop of water?" he murmured.

"Here is some," was answered, in a pleasant voice, and Linola, the Indian girl, appeared before him, with a canteen which she had just unslung from her side.

CHAPTER X.

TOO AFFECTIONATE.

Tom received the canteen, and took a deep, refreshing draught. He also bathed his head and temples with the cool water.

"I feel better now," he said. "How came you here at this hour?" he added, gazing with admiration upon the beautiful girl.

"It is not far from the hut where Linola lives with Mokatook, her old mother. I came out to walk a little, which I like to do when weather is clear and stars are bright."

"You do not speak like most Indian women," said Tom. "Your way of talking is better. Why is that?"

"Magician' been give lessons. Him teach me some to speak and write."

"So you can write, too?"

"Yes, but not very well."

"I wish you would guide me to the 'magician.' I must see him before I leave these mountains."

"He not want to see white people."

"You are sure you heard him say that?"

"Yes; other Indians hear him say so, too."

"I think there must be some mistake. I know he would see me. Will you do me a favor?"

"Anything Linola can do that is right, she will do for the white boy."

"Well, then, I wish you would tell the 'magician' that a white boy, named Tom Temple, is in these mountains, looking for him, and that he believes he is his son."

"I will tell him, but it will be of no use."

"Yes, I might know that," said Tom, "for when I ran after him, this very night, and told him my name was Tom Temple, he did not heed me."

"You ran after 'magician'?"

In a few words the boy described his chase of the deformed man and the result.

"Poor boy," said Linola. "You been have much trouble; but him you run after is some deaf, so him not could have heard what you said."

"That accounts for it," cried Tom. "I feel sure that, had he heard my name, he would have stopped, or I might have learned that he was really my father."

Linola smiled. Her dark eyes beamed upon the speaker with a peculiar expression—a look of interest and sympathy that set Tom's heart to thumping violently.

He rose and took her hand.

"Linola," he said. "I never yet saw a girl that I like so much as I do you. You and I will be good friends."

"We will be friends," she answered, coyly drawing away her hand.

She looked so bewitching, standing there in the dim light, that Tom said:

"Let us seal the compact with a kiss."

"No," said Linola, giving her head a toss. "Linola is only a poor Indian girl, but she not kiss strangers."

"But you know we are friends, now," said Tom.

Linola stood silent, tapping the rock with one of her little feet.

"Your friend, the trapper boy, not is so bad as you," she said, with a mischievous smile. "Him more respect—him not ask for kiss."

"Do you like him?" inquired Tom.

"Yes, me like him much," she replied, smoothing, with both hands, her long, dark tresses. "Him plenty make fun."

"I suppose I'm too serious for you," said Tom, gloomily.

"Me not say that."

"Oh, I understand. You like a boy that will flirt with you, and I'm not one of that sort."

"Sober boy more bad than funny boy," answered Linola. "Sober boy ask for kiss—funny boy not."

"Are you ready to give me that kiss?"

"No—no—no!"

And as she spoke, she drew back, holding up both little hands.

"B'ars and buffaloes!" came a clear, ringing voice. "I don't ask fur a kiss! I take it, ef I want it!"

There was a slight scream from the girl, as Buck Bowie came leaping, like a young panther, from behind a rock near, and gave Linola two hearty smacks—one on her full, red lips, and another on the left cheek.

"Oh, you bad boy—bad! bad! bad!" she cried.

And, blushing crimson, she turned and fled like a deer.

"I'd give chase, ef I wasn't afraid of losing you again," said Buck, turning to Tom. "Whar in thunder hev you been? I heard your rifle, not long since, and that's what brought me this way."

"Was it?" said Tom, sulkily. "I'd have thought it was the girl that brought you this way more than anything else, judging from your actions."

"Had I known she was hyar, I should hev come anyway, you kin bet, fur I like that gal."

"You show it a little too plainly."

"Well, so long as she don't find fault, I kin see no reason fur you to."

"Oh, if you choose to be rude to a woman, I have no more to say!"

"Thar's nothing rude in kissing. I take to it as naturally as a b'ar takes to honey."

"Well, we'll drop the subject," said Tom, with a look of disgust.

"All right, then, let's 'pack it,' and now tell me how you came to leave your post, while I was asleep. I 'woke, and missing you thought you was a gone coon, shore?"

Tom briefly related his adventure. When he spoke of his bear encounter, the long-limbed young trapper leaned far back, laughing heartily.

"I see nothing to laugh at," said Tom.

"The joke is jest hyar," answered Buck. "It seems you waited fur the critter to come down from the top of the rock and corner you on a dead tree before you fired. I kin imagine I see you dropping off that tree, expecting the b'ar to come atop of you."

"I must own I can't see the joke. As to firing, the light was too dim for me to do that while the bear was on top of the rock."

"Well, well, every man to his taste. What do you suppose made that deformed chap run away from you?"

"I don't know, unless he did not care to be questioned."

"We'll hunt him up again in the morning. We better make a lounge somebar fur the present, as you seem pretty well used up."

They found a mossy rock, upon which Tom stretched himself, to soon fall into a deep slumber, while his companion, with his rifle over his shoulder, walked to and fro, keeping a lookout.

All at once he heard a low voice above him.

"Hist! hunter boy, hist!"

He looked up, to see Linola on a projecting shelf of rock.

"So you are thar, beauty?" said Buck.

"I come to ask how poor boy seem to be. Does he sleep well? Was he hurt much?"

"Oh, he's well enough," answered Buck. "Kin I hev another kiss?"

"No, you bad boy, no!"

Buck sealed the rock with the activity of a tiger, and overtook the girl before she could ascend a more difficult crag in her way. He threw an arm about the supple waist. She screamed and struggled in his grasp as he endeavored to kiss her, and perceiving that she was really offended, he was about to let go his hold, when he was seized by the throat and pulled violently away from her.

"Leave the girl alone! You young fool, what do you mean?" cried a stern voice.

Buck was surprised to discover that his assailant was the deformed man, who, in jerking him aside, had shown himself possessed of enormous strength.

The fiery-tempered boy, without pausing to reflect, whipped out his knife like a flash, but, ere he could use it, his opponent pushed him away from him with a force that sent the youth down upon his side. Still more enraged, the latter drew his pistol, and aimed quickly at the head of the other. To his surprise, his hideous-looking opponent never budged, but stood quietly before him, a strange smile playing about his mouth!

"Hello! By the Lord!" cried the boy admiringly, as he lowered his pistol and sprung to his feet. "Ef you kin stand fire that way, Buck Bowie ain't the one to shoot sech a game coon!"

As he spoke the deformed man glided off among the rocks, followed by the Indian girl.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SKELETON.

The morning following the events just related was bright and clear.

Linola, the Indian girl, had risen early in the morning from her couch of matting in the mountain hut, had made a hasty toilet, and leaving her old mother asleep, she wound her way swiftly among the rocky labyrinth.

From a distance Tom and his companion had been watching her, but, on reaching a high rock, she vanished like magic, and did not again reappear.

Ten minutes later she was speeding along the secret pass, leading toward the magician's house.

Finally she arrived at the door.

The house was a small one, not built of stone, as the boys had supposed, but merely of logs, neatly arranged to line a roomy cave, which had an opening at the top, in which a rude chimney had been put up. The door being wide open, revealed the interior, lighted by two apertures in the sides of the apartment. The floor was of smoothly hewn logs, and a couple of canvas hammocks swung about two feet above it, at the further end. The furniture consisted merely of a rude bench and a table. Among the other contents of the room, the most conspicuous was a telescope, about twelve feet long, on a tripod, and which was now pointed toward the doorway, with the upper end of the tube slightly elevated.

A middle-aged man, with thick, black hair hanging nearly to his shoulders and a grizzly beard, almost concealing a face lighted by a pair of brilliant black eyes, keen and eager in their expression, was looking attentively through the instrument.

Near him, paper and pencil in hand, was seated the deformed man, who has been alluded to.

The entrance of the Indian girl caused both men to look up.

"Well, Linola, what news? Any more white people about?" inquired the person at the telescope.

"No, only the boys. It is of one of them I would speak to you."

"I am not interested in them, except so far as their safety is concerned. I hope your people will not offer again to harm them, and I hope that they may be persuaded to go away from here."

"One of them want me to tell you that his name is Tom Temple, and that he thinks you are his father!"

The "magician," for he it was whom the girl now addressed, started—a wild, eager look on his face.

"Temple? did he say his name was Temple?"

"Yes—so he tell me."

"What sort of a looking boy is he? Is he cross-eyed?"

"Cross-eye? What you mean?"

"Crooked in the eye—eye twisted to one side. This way," and he endeavored to illustrate.

"No—no," said Linola, blushing. "Him fine look boy, every way."

"Although I saw both boys distinctly only once sir," spoke up the deformed man, "I feel quite sure I did not notice the misfortune you speak of about either of them."

"Then the boy who says his name is Tom Temple is either an impostor, trying in this way, to gain access to me, or else he is the son of some other Temple. I dare say there are men out this way, among the miners, of the same name as myself, and that may account for the lad's error. The next time you see him, Linola," he added, turning to the girl, "you can tell him that I am not his father—that he had better go to some of the settlements to look for that person, as I am now sure he will not find him here."

"Yes, I tell him," answered the girl, "and I glad if he go away, for the Indians do not want boys here, and I afraid they do harm by and by."

"You must keep a sort of watch of them," said the "magician," turning to his assistant. "I would not

have the boys hurt. It is very rash of them to venture here among the Blackfeet."

"I will do the best I can," answered the other. "I have saved their lives once, and I will still try to shield them from harm, but I am afraid the Indians will soon lose patience, and contrive to slay them, while I am not by."

Linola now departed, and the magician again applied his eye to the telescope.

"Do you see it yet, sir?" inquired his assistant.

"No—not yet. The sun is hardly high enough, and— Halloa! by George! Yes! there it is, now!" he suddenly interrupted.

What he saw was a brilliant ball of dazzling light—a fixed mass apparently about the size of a man's head, that scintillated and sparkled in the rays of the sun!

The assistant rose and gazed in the direction of the stupendous crags and towering cliffs far away among which the glittering object was visible, but which, seen with the naked eye, seemed no bigger than a large button.

"Do you see it, Jameson?"

"Yes—there it is—in the same spot where we have noticed it for the last two years, without being able to find it."

"We must find it," said Temple. "I am confident that what we see is a *bump of gold*! With such a lump there, there must be many others in the vicinity—a mine of unbounded wealth!"

"Still, as I have said many times before," remarked Jameson, "it may, after all, be nothing more than mica or it may possibly be silver."

"No—no—neither mica nor silver could show that reddish-yellow luster. I tell you it is gold!"

"Strange that not even the Indians, who first pointed it out to us, have been able to find that gleaming knob."

"That is because it never shows longer than half an hour—only while the sun is in a certain position. Then, again, the trouble is that most all the peaks and cliffs in that direction are nearly alike—so that we have no particular mark to go by in looking for it. It must be in a perilous locality, too, for, according to Mokatook—Linola's mother—the old Indian woman who first told me about it, my brother, whom I have thus far been unable to find, strangely disappeared while searching for it."

"One would almost feel tempted to give up the search," said Jameson, shrugging his shoulders.

"I will not give it up. It is this which has so long kept me away from home—from those who are so dear to me. But I have written to them many times, so as to let them know the cause of my long absence, and I trust they do not feel worried about me."

"I hope your letters have reached them," said the assistant. "It is strange you get no answers."

"No, that is not strange, for I have told them on no account to send me a letter. That would be sure to bring some white man this way in search of me. As you know, I do not even carry my own letters to the settlement for the mail, but send one of the Blackfeet with them."

"Are you sure he posts them in the right quarter?"

"I have no reason to doubt it. Why should he not? I have so worked on the superstition of these Indians that I believe they would do anything I should ask of them, except to spare their enemies—and even that they would do if I were present when they were going to slay their foes. Now, then, Jameson, let us again try to make some mark for finding that precious gold knob—that 'Eye of the Morning,' as the Indians call it."

The assistant sat ready.

"An old, blasted pine, about a hundred yards to the left of the knob. Put that down, Jameson, and that's the mark I'll try for next time," said Mr. Temple.

"I've got it down," responded Jameson a few moments later.

"Very well. The tree on a line with the round-topped rock nearest to us."

"All right—down," said Jameson.

Several more marks which Temple thought might assist him were jotted down, by which time the glittering knob had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"Now, then, I go again to make an attempt to find that ball of gold," said Temple, as soon as he and his companion had partaken of a frugal repast.

Temple put on a brown shirt, a pair of canvas trowsers, and strong but light boots. Then slinging a rifle, and also a coil of small rope, beside his ammunition pouches, he turned to depart.

"I suppose you will not be back for several days?" said Jameson. "I do not like your going alone on these tramps. Why not let me go with you?"

"I prefer to have the honor of making the discovery alone," said Temple—"as I have told you before."

"I believe you are afraid I would put in a claim for my share if we found the mine together," said Jameson, sadly.

"No, no!" cried Temple. "I did not mean that, my friend, believe me."

"I am glad of it, for I could never forget the great service you rendered me, so far as to wish for the smallest profit from any valuable discovery you may make. The deformed wanderer, helpless among the mountains, with a contagious fever, which caused him to be abandoned even by the Indians with whom he had traded, must have perished, had you not led him to your retreat, and fearlessly doctored him there. It was more your kindness than anything else that cured me."

"You make too much of it," said Temple. "I studied medicine in my youth, and knew just what to prescribe for your disease. And now I will tell you that my real reason for not wanting you to go with me is because I know that, in spite of your great strength, any great hardship you may undergo is apt to bring on a fever. Believe me when I say that you are very liable to fevers."

"I know it—it is hereditary," answered the other. "Still I am not afraid—"

"Well, I am," interrupted Temple, smiling. "What should I do without my assistant?" he added. "I could never get another like you. You are excellent at obtaining game, while I am so poor a shot at long range that I would starve to death if I relied on my own rifle for obtaining food. No, no, Jameson; take good care of yourself, that you may hunt pigeons, geese and deer for our table, while I hunt for gold."

So saying, Mr. Temple started on his way.

After toiling among rocks and crags for many hours he finally reached the round-topped rock marked down on the slip of paper. From the summit of the rock he now looked in vain for the blasted pine, which, seen through the telescope, had seemed to be on a line with this rock.

"Strange," he muttered, "that I cannot see the pine now."

He descended the rock and moved on as fast as he could over the difficult crags and through the deep, rugged valleys in his path.

For two days he vainly continued his search for the knob of gold.

On the morning of the second day he caught sight of something white far down in a ravine, on the edge of which he stood. By means of the rope he had brought with him he now descended into the ravine.

Then he discovered that the white object he had seen was the half-broken skeleton of a human being!

"This would seem like a warning to me to give up my search," he muttered.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

A handsome, quaintly-carved clasp-knife lay near

the skeleton. It was rusty and old-looking from having lain there so long, but Temple thought he could recognize that knife as one he had often seen in his brother's possession!

It was a search for this person which had first brought him out to these wild regions, and now, at last, he had found the skeleton of the lost one.

He picked up the knife, and, after rubbing off the rust from the silvered handle, he there read the name of his brother.

"There can be no doubt of it now," he muttered. "I have found all that remains of him at last. He must have fallen into this ravine while searching for that knob of gold."

At that moment a succession of wild whoops caused the speaker to start and listen.

CHAPTER XII.

DESERTED.

The noises heard by Mr. Temple could not be very far off.

There was a narrow defile leading out of the ravine, and which described a gradual ascent.

By means of this defile the 'magician' reached a crag, which afforded him a view of an unexpected scene in the distance.

On a lofty rock stood Buck, the young trapper, holding converse with Black Thunder, who, at the head of a dozen Blackfoot warriors, stood at the base of a narrow, rocky path leading to the spot the young hunter occupied.

Near the boy stood the well-known form of beautiful Linola, the Indian girl, in her most coquettish attire, with a beautiful long red ribbon, which Buck had given to her, added to the ornaments upon her hat.

"Keep back, you varmints!" shouted Buck. "I tell you I won't give her up, although you may do your worst! She's consented to go with me, and I'll hang on to seek a beauty prize, you kin bet, while that's life in my body!"

As he spoke he thumped the butt of his long rifle on the hard rock to give emphasis to what he said.

Standing on the lofty height, his active figure surmounted by the coonskin cap, his tanned face full of determination, the boy presented a striking picture, and seemed well matched with the beautiful girl, who, as he had said, had consented to go off with him.

Suddenly the old squaw whom Linola called her mother, emerged from behind a rock where she had stood, close to the young hunter. She threw up her arms, and spoke in the native tongue to the warriors below, but Black Thunder answered with a derisive shout. Then, addressing Buck, he said:

"The white boy has no right to Linola! In a few moons Black Thunder would have taken her for his own wife!"

"Yes," answered Buck, "to make a drudge of her—to work her to death! It war a 'tarnal shame, to treat the beauty so! It war hoggish, to use no worse a term!"

"Black Thunder is no hog!" the chief roared back.

"You are a hog in everything 'cept the bristles—that I'll allow!" answered Buck.

"Black Thunder no hog! The white boy shall find he is a wolf!" retorted the Indian, "unless he let girl come back. He no right steal girl!"

"I did not steal her, Injun. She went with me of her own accord! Ain't that so, beauty?" he added, turning to Linola. "She kin speak for herself."

At this the girl advanced to the edge of the rock, by her mother's side, and, looking down at the Indians, she cried in a sweet voice:

"Go away, Black Thunder, go away! I do not want you for a husband! No, and I go with the trapper boy of my own free will!"

"Why does she not want Black Thunder?" inquired the chief. "He is strong and well. He has often brought her beautiful birds and flowers. He has laid the sweetest deer-meat at her feet. The

very dress she wears was taken from an antelope, shot by Black Thunder."

"Black Thunder is strong and well, but he is too old for Linola! Why not take Linola's mother? She would make him a good wife!"

And as she spoke the girl laid her hand on the shoulder of the squaw, who, besides being clumsy and ugly, had an enormous wart on each side of her flat nose.

Black Thunder showed his disgust by laying a hand on his stomach, and uttering a loud gibber, like that of a horse.

"Very ungentlemanly!" cried Buck. "Ef you treat the gal's mother that way, how do you expect the gal could talk to you, even ef you war younger?"

"Black Thunder is not old!" shouted the chief. "No! he is young enough to scalp the boy trapper, and to do it alone, if he had the chance!"

"Thar's a lie!" answered Buck. "I wouldn't be afraid to take my chance with you, anywhere you like, but I'd know thar'd be treachery. You'd hev your men to help you!"

"Give up Linola," said the chief, "and Black Thunder will not harm you."

"I'm not afraid of you. As to giving up the gal, that I sw'ar I'll not do!"

The chief measured the rocky path with his eye. He knew that he and his men could advance only in single file, and that the deadly, unerring rifle of the young trapper would lay most of his warriors low ere they could reach him, while they themselves would not dare to fire for fear of hitting the girl.

"The white hunter says he is not afraid of Black Thunder! Then let him show it. Come down here, and he and the Indian will fight to the death! Linola will soon see that Black Thunder is as strong and quick as a young man!"

"Do you take me, Injun, for a 'tarnal fool? Do you s'pose I'm goin' to give you a chance to play off your treach'ous games with me?"

"Then, if your 'fraid to come to Black Thunder—he is not afraid to come to you!"

And, motioning to his warriors to keep back, the chief strode up the rocky path!

"Don't know as I kin back out, now," said Buck, turning to Linola. "Ef it wasn't fur you, I wouldn't think of it. Ef anything happens to me, now, Black Thunder will hev you!"

"Don't fight!" pleaded Linola. "I am afraid you will be killed! Let us go away from here. Come!"

"By the 'tarnal! no! Ef ever I turn my back on a single Injun, I hope to be skinned fur a weasel!"

So saying, the young trapper, drawing his long knife, prepared for combat.

Black Thunder had also drawn his knife, and the moment he reached the top of the rock, he bounded like a tiger toward the youth, aiming a blow at his heart.

This Buck avoided by a twist of the body; then his own knife clove the air.

The chief was not quick enough to wholly escape the blow, the blade passing through the skin above his ribs. In aiming another stroke at his young adversary, the latter dodged causing him to fall and strike his nose against the rock, upon which the blade of his knife was broken. Enraged at his undignified situation, the Indian sprung quickly to his feet, and sent his tomahawk flying at the head of his opponent.

The latter dodged it, and sprung toward the chief, now aiming with the butt of his rifle a blow at his head, by which he hoped to stun him, make him prisoner, and keep him as a hostage.

To avoid the blow, Black Thunder stepped back close to the edge of the steep, rocky path. A loose rock gave way beneath him, but he would have recovered his balance had not the squaw, Linola's mother, stepping forward to grasp him, so as to prevent his going, stumbled against him.

With a frightful yell, the Indian tumbled headlong from the edge of the precipice to the right of the

path, and struck the ground near his warriors, crushing his skull and dying instantly!

For a moment the Indians stood looking down upon the remains of their chief; then they flourished their tomahawks, glaring up at the young trapper, and uttering demoniacal yells of rage.

"It was not fault of boy!" cried Linola, from the summit of the precipice. "Him, Black Thunder, fall from accident!"

"That is not so. Boy strike at Black Thunder, and that make him fall! Now he must die! Yes, we must have scalp, if we hunt him far or near!" cried one of the savages.

Followed by Linola and the squaw, Buck now hurried off among the rocks, but he had not proceeded far when he saw his enemies coming up to intercept him. Turning, he perceived that they were approaching on both sides of the rock he now occupied.

"Thar'll be some music before I die!" cried the boy as he aimed his long rifle at the foremost of his pursuers.

The Indian dodged behind a rock as he fired, and ere he could reload, his foes were hemming him in, with half a dozen rifles pointed toward him.

"No, no!" cried Linola, as she got between the weapons and the boy. "No shoot! no shoot!"

But some of the Indians sprung forward, pushing her aside, and the next moment a tomahawk would have cloven the lad's brain, had not Mr. Temple arrived in time to seize the uplifted arm.

He quickly threw himself between the youth and his assailants.

"This must not be! The Indians must not harm the white boy!"

"He has killed the great Black Thunder!" cried one of the warriors. "The Indian must have his revenge!"

"Listen!" said Mr. Temple, solemnly. "It was the Great Spirit that caused Black Thunder to die! Two moons ago, I looked through my 'glass gun,' and saw a great shadow, which said: 'Black Thunder must die, that his tribe may be saved! Should he live, the chief would have the small-pox, and he would give it to all the rest of the tribe, and sweep them away from the earth.'"

"Ugh! the magic man has a wise head, and he can see far, and we believe him," responded the savage, "but we must have revenge for the blood of our chief!"

"No. The Great Spirit told me that the life of the white boy should not be taken. Woe to the Blackfeet if they kill the boy!"

At this every tomahawk was lowered, and the savages, stepping back, held a consultation, in a low, solemn voice.

"Come with me," said the "magician" to the young trapper.

The latter followed his conductor among the labyrinths of the rocks, where they were soon hidden from the savages.

Looking around him, the boy perceived that neither the girl nor her mother had come with them.

The youth was about turning back to seek and call them, when Mr. Temple laid a hand on his arm.

"No," he said. "Better not trust yourself with those Indians again. In spite of what I have said, they may conclude to slay you."

"But the gal! She was to go with me!" cried Buck.

"Where were you going to take her to?"

"To Bannack, whar I meant to make her my wife."

"Has she consented to be your wife?"

"Not exactly; but I know she would, or else she wouldn't have agreed to go off with me! Thar's how it is!"

"That girl is a great coquette. You can never be sure of her!"

"I suppose you know her pretty well, sir; but I'm shore she likes me well enough to be my wife. My

friend and I quarreled about her, and we agreed to part. I wasn't going to leave her whar he could hev any show, fur I wanted to marry her myself, and I found it easy to persuade her to go with me, on condition that her mother went with us."

Mr. Temple endeavored to persuade the youth not to go back.

As he could not, he accompanied him; but neither the girl nor the Indians could now be found.

"Linola will probably go back with her people, and I'd advise you to go back to Bannack as soon as you can," said Mr. Temple.

"No, sir; I'll find that gal, ef I die fur it."

"Well, then, I have no more to say," answered the other, as he turned away to continue his search for the gold knob.

"Good-by," said Buck. "Although Tom Temple and I hev quarreled, I hope he may fall in with you, fur I now know you to be the one he's been looking for. He thinks you are his father."

"So I have heard," said Mr. Temple, dryly, "but he is mistaken."

A minute later the two lost sight of each other among the rocks.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUEL.

As Buck had stated, he and Tom Temple had quarreled about Linola and had separated.

After his late friend was gone, Tom, as his temper cooled, felt lonesome enough there among the wild peaks of the Rocky Mountains.

He still prosecuted his search for the "magician," but, as may be supposed, his efforts were unsuccessful. Weary and dispirited when night came, he crawled into a hollow between the rocks, and having partaken of some of the contents of his wallet, he lay down and tried to sleep.

When he awoke, just before midnight, he was startled to see the hideous person of the deformed man between him and the moon, which was now hovering over a peak in front of the hollow. The man was watching him earnestly, and, when he opened his eyes, he moved toward him.

"At last I have found you!" cried Tom, starting to his feet.

He closely scrutinized the scarred face, but he could there see not the slightest resemblance to his father as he remembered him.

"You are the magician?" said Tom.

"No; I am his assistant."

"Why did you run away from me the other night?"

"Because I did not want to be questioned."

"And now?"

"I have come to advise you to leave this place. The man you seek is not the person you take him for; he is no relation of yours."

"How do you know? What is his name?"

"I know you are not his son. Linola conveyed your message to him two days ago, and he stated that his son had a deformity, which you have not."

"A deformity?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"He had lost an eye."

"There may be a mistake."

"No; I heard him tell Linola that his son had lost an eye."

Tom looked puzzled and seemed to reflect.

"Why did not Linola bring me this message?"

"She is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; she and your friend went off together—so one of the Indians has told me."

Tom turned pale.

"Gone and left me!" he cried, much excited. "I would not have believed it. I thought she cared something for me, and, after all, she was in love with that long-legged must of a trapper! If I meet

him he shall pay for this!" added Tom, his eyes fairly turning green with jealousy.

Jameson smiled.

"Linola is a sad coquette!" he said. "But I wouldn't care, if I were you. After all, she is only an Indian girl!"

"He shall pay for taking her away from me!" cried Tom, looking at his rifle.

"This is nonsense!" said Jameson.

"Is it? Well, we'll see, if I ever get hold of him. Where have they gone to?"

"To Bannack, where, according to the Indian, your friend means to make her his wife."

Tom fairly ground his teeth with rage.

"Well, after I see the magician, I will go after them."

"I would do no such thing, if I were you. The girl has a right to her choice, and so has your friend. Better leave them alone, and return home."

"I don't care what you say; Buck has served me a mean trick, sneaking off with that girl, without giving me the ghost of a chance!"

"Pooh! 'all's fair in love and war!' The Indians don't like her going off, especially Black Thunder, who was to have made her his bride in a week from now! At the head of some of his men, he is in hot chase of the couple, and may overtake them. The affair has so incensed all the savages, that I don't think you are safe here, another day, and had better leave. In fact, what have you now to stay here for? You know that the 'magician' is not your father."

Tom made no reply, but again a puzzled look came over his face.

"I must see him, at any rate!" he said.

"You cannot see him. You can never find his retreat. I have warned you, and you had better take my advice, and go away from here."

So saying the deformed man turned, and, gliding off, soon disappeared among the shadows of the rocks.

Tom crawled back into the hollow, and strove in vain to compose himself. He kept thinking of what Jameson had told him about the "magician," and also about his former friend and the Indian girl.

At dawn, after having had his breakfast of venison and a piece of corn-meal cake, the boy started off again to hunt for the "magician." He scaled crags, rocks and cliffs, until he was tired, when he paused on a rugged shelf to rest.

He rose, and was about to persevere in his search, when, suddenly, a tall form sprung up from between the rocks and confronted him.

It was Buck Bowie, the young trapper! There he stood, rifle in hand, the tail of his coonskin cap resting on one of his broad shoulders, his tanned face deeply flushed and a sort of sneering smile deforming his usual frank, open countenance.

"Hi! therel so it's you!" cried Tom, reddening with anger.

"Thar's a fact—it's me!" answered the other; "and I jest want to ask you a question, Tom Temple."

"Go on! Perhaps I have some to ask, too!"

"Well, then, hyar goes! Whar is she?"

"Who?"

"Why Linola to be shore! I tracked her rear hyar, jest before daylight, and now she's disappeared; and I want to know whar you've hid her from me!"

"I have not seen her! A pretty trick you played me, taking her off! So she's run away from you, after all! I'm glad to hear that."

"I played no trick. I'm not the man for that. She went with me 'thout much persuading and would hev staid with me, too, but for the coming of them 'farnal Injuns from whom I was rescued by that magician-chap you're looking for, but who caused me to get separated from the gal. I've been 'huntn' for her ever since and jest before I came hyar I saw her plain enough! Well, ef you've had nothing to do with her disappearing, it's all right, and I hev no more to say!"

He would have moved on had not Tom caught his arm.

"Don't be in a hurry, Buck," he said sternly. "Do you think I'm going to tamely allow you to 'cut me out' in this way?"

"I haven't cut you out. Didn't I say the gal went of her own accord? Come, Tom, I don't want to hev any more trouble with you."

"Are you afraid?"

The other came to a dead halt.

"I reckin the coon is skars that I'd be afraid of," he said, "but I am afraid, fur all that."

"So you own up!"

"Yes, I'm a'raid of myself!"

"Of yourself? Hol ho!"

"You kin jeer as much as you like, Tom Temple, but the fact is, I hev a bad temper, and don't like it to git the best of me, ef I kin help it, so I always try to keep it down. Twice it did git the best of me and I almost killed my man. I'd hev been hung ef I had killed him, and as I don't keer to hev such a disgraceful death, prefarrin the more honorable one of being scalped by Insuns, or something like it, I try to keep out of quarreling wharever and whenever I kin!"

"A good excuse," said Tom, sneeringly, his eyes twinkling—"a safe one, too!"

Buck's darkly-tanned face seemed to turn purple.

He aimed, with his clinched fist, a blow at Tom's head which would have felled a bull. But Tom dodged it.

"I want no such boy's play as that," he said. "These are what we are to fight with."

And, as he spoke, he pulled a pistol from his belt.

"By the 'tarnall' hev your way, then, ef you want it!" cried the young trapper.

"Eleven paces are far enough apart," said Tom.

The other quickly measured the distance with his feet, and the two boys faced each other.

"See, hyar!" cried Buck, whose temper had by this time cooled. "You know I'm a dead shot, and ef I should kill you it would go against my conscience. I hope you'll change your mind about our fighting with these murderous weapons."

"No," said Tom, "and if you kill me it will be my own fault. Are you ready?"

"All ready!" answered the other.

"I will give the signal—one, two, three! At the word 'Three!' we will both fire."

"Hev your way," answered Buck, but he resolved to fire, if possible, in such a manner as to only slightly wound his opponent.

Tom, to tell the truth, had made up his mind to do the same thing, for the idea of killing his former friend was repugnant to him.

Buck stood near the edge of a deep, dark ravine, from the sides of which grew trailing vines, which had found root between crevices in the steep wall.

At the given signal the boys pulled trigger, but only Tom's weapon went off, the young trapper's having missed fire.

He reeled a moment on the edge of the ravine; then down he went, falling into the dark depths.

"What have I done?" cried Tom, in dismay. "I have killed him! He is lost!"

Thrusting his pistol into his belt, he ran to the edge of the ravine, and peered into it.

But he heard no sound—saw nothing but the thick vines, partly thrust aside, where the body had fallen through them! Below these all was darkness—impenetrable gloom!

The conscience-stricken boy threw himself down on the rock, suffering greater anguish than the most painful wound would have caused him.

CHAPTER XIV.

ADRIFT.

FINALLY Tom Temple rose from his prostrate position still very miserable and dejected. For hours he wandered aimlessly among the wild crags of the mountains.

Just after sundown he saw, far above him, a column of smoke, which he at once inferred came from the "magician's" abode.

Huge rocks, piled one upon the other, thus forming a sort of rugged, uncouth "staircase," rose before him. They were too steep to climb, but there were rough projections on the summit of each, over which a rope might be thrown. There being no other way to reach the point whence the smoke seemed to proceed, the boy, unslinging the line he carried over his shoulders, formed a noose at one end, which he flung to the top of the first rock, about fifteen feet above him. The noose caught about a projection, and having pulled the rope taut, the lad commenced to climb.

The line slipping a little as he ascended, was brought directly over a dark, deep, yawning chasm in the rock below, but there seemed no danger, as he had not far to go, and as the rope was easy to ascend.

But when he was half-way up, Tom heard an angry sort of howl, and then beheld a gaunt, fierce-looking wolf advance from between some rocky fragments, and commence to gnaw savagely at the rope with its sharp fangs!

The boy remembered that, a few days before, he had used the rope to drag a deer he had shot from a deep hollow, and that some of the blood had saturated the strands of the line. This it was which attracted the wolf, and caused him to bite so savagely at the hemp.

In fact the animal, unless driven away, would soon bite through it, and Tom be precipitated into the frightful chasm beneath him! He shouted, yelled, uttered all sorts of discordant noises, but in vain; the brute continued to cut the strands, which were already nearly severed with its sharp teeth.

"I'll try this!" muttered Tom, *as* last.

He drew his pistol from his belt, took aim and pulled trigger, movements difficult to perform, as to execute them he was obliged to cling to the rope with one hand.

The hammer descended on the nipple, but there was no explosion.

Then it flashed on Tom's mind that, in his agitation at having shot the young trapper, he had forgotten to reload his weapon!

It was impossible to do this in his present position. Even had it not been, the wolf would gnaw the rope through ere he could have time to ram in a cartridge.

There seemed no escape for him, and the youth gave himself up as lost.

At that critical moment, there was a whizzing sound, and the lad saw an arrow, sent from some point above, pierce the body of the beast, and kill the creature almost instantly!

"Climb quick, before rope break, and you safe!" cried a well-known voice.

It was Linola who spoke, but the boy could not see her, as she evidently kept herself hidden behind one of the many rocks of the cliff.

Tom soon gained the summit of the rock. "Linola, where are you?" he called, but there was no reply.

From crag to crag, by means of the rope, the lad continued to climb, but he looked in vain for the girl who had saved his life.

Persevering in his search, he found himself, toward midnight, in a rocky pass, which he hoped might prove to be the secret way leading to the "magician's" retreat. But, instead of that, he found himself, on reaching the end of the path, close to a swift, rapid stream which he had previously noticed at the base of the height.

Thoroughly worn out with his exertions, he threw himself down by the stream, and, ere he was aware of it, he dropped into a profound sleep.

He was at last awakened by a feeling of motion. He sat up, scarcely able to credit his senses. He was in a canoe, on the stream.

The light vessel, steered by an old squaw—Linola's mother—was gliding swiftly along with the cur-

rent. Dawn was breaking, and the lad could perceive that he was being borne on a course parallel with the Rocky Mountain range.

"What does this mean? How came I here?" he inquired of the squaw.

The old woman fumbling beneath her robe, drew forth a slip of folded paper, which she gave to the boy. While he was reading it, she guided the canoe to the right bank, got out, and made off, soon disappearing in a growth of shrubbery near it.

The note was as follows:

"Go far from here. Already the Indians seek you, bent on having your scalp. I found you asleep. By being careful, I succeeded, with Mokatook's assistance, in putting you into this canoe without awaking you. I directed the old squaw to remain with you until you opened your eyes, when she was to leave you and return to me. Let the canoe carry you on. It will convey you to a small settlement, about seventy miles from here, where you will be safe.

"A FRIEND."

"This, I take it, was written by the deformed man," muttered Tom. "He seems determined to get me away from the 'magician,' but I will yet balk him. I do not believe it would be much safer to go the route he proposes than to remain up in the mountains. At any rate, I'll yet see that 'magician,' unless I die in the attempt. I dread death now less than I ever did before!" he added, shuddering at the thought of the fatal duel with the young trapper.

The canoe had evidently been carried a long distance from the place he had occupied on the previous night. He left it, allowing it to drift with the current, and endeavored to track the old Indian woman. But he lost sight of the print of her moccasins the moment he reached the cliffs and crags of the mountains. For two days he vainly strove to find the locality near the magician's home. He saw no smoke—saw nothing to serve him for a guide, and he realized that he was lost among these wild mountains.

There was still enough provision remaining in his wallet to last him for the day.

On the next, after a restless slumber, he had recourse to his rifle. He had now become a tolerably good shot, and seeing a large wild pigeon on a crag above and ahead of him, he fired at it. The bullet struck and killed the bird, which, however, did not fall from its perch, so that Tom was obliged to climb to it.

It was upon a lofty peak, which the boy reached with some difficulty.

He prepared the bird and soon had it roasting over a fire, which he made with some fagots, collected from a mass of dead brushwood, not far off, and lighted with matches taken from a water proof case which he had brought from home.

He made a good meal; then he climbed a loftier rock near him to take a view of his position, and to look if he could see any sign of the magician's home.

By this time the sun had risen and the light shone upon some of the peaks, while others were still untouched by the rays.

All at once the lad's gaze fell upon a bright object far away on the side of one of the peaks, and which, seen from that distance, appeared to be about the size of a small egg.

Tom uttered a cry of surprise. What he saw was that wonderful "Eye"—that dazzling orb of light, which the "magician" had said was gold!

"What can it be?" muttered the boy.

He watched it for about a quarter of an hour, when, to his surprise, it suddenly disappeared.

As he still gazed toward the quarter where he had seen it, he beheld the figure of a man emerge from behind a rock which had previously screened him, and climb to the top of a loftier peak, where he stood gazing in the direction of the object which had attracted the lad's attention. The man's position was midway between his own and the place where

the glittering knob had shown itself. At so great a distance the stranger could not be distinctly seen, but it flashed upon Tom's mind that this might be the "magician." He remembered what Buck had said about this person's appearing, and saving his life from the Indians in some place at a distance from his mountain home, and it now occurred to the lad that he might, for some reason have remained absent from his habitation. He endeavored by signaling with his kerchief to attract the man's attention, but, failing in this, he discharged his rifle. The stranger, unless he was deaf, must have heard it. In fact, he turned his head in the direction of the sound, but instead of approaching the boy, he now moved off the other way and soon disappeared among the rocks.

"That makes me pretty sure it is the very one I want to see," muttered Tom, "for he seems to want to keep away from me, and I have heard that the 'magician' tries to avoid all white strangers."

Slinging his rifle, the youth started toward the point where he had last seen the man.

The way was difficult. Crags and peaks had to be climbed, deep valleys traversed, and ravines now and then crossed his path, compelling him to make wide *detours* to get around them.

All day he vainly searched for the person he had seen.

CHAPTER XV.

A FORCED COMPACT.

NEXT morning Tom was posted on a lofty peak, looking carefully around him.

Having slept well during the night, and having made a breakfast of what was left of the pigeon he had shot the day before, the boy was prepared for further exertions to find the person he was in search of.

As he gazed in the direction where he had last seen the man, he was surprised to behold again that glittering knob, which had excited his curiosity on the previous morning.

There it was, still far away among the lofty peaks, shining with dazzling splendor, and again, between it and him, the lad beheld the man he was looking for.

He watched him steadily and noticed that he was gazing intently toward the glittering mass ahead—that he appeared to be jotting down something in a note-book, as if trying to take the exact bearings of the shining object.

"I have it!" cried Tom. "He wants to get to that glittering thing, which has excited his curiosity, so as to see what it is. Now, then, if I can find it, too, we'll both stand a chance of meeting at the same place. That's good! it gives me a fixed point to make for, and I shall yet find myself face to face with that mysterious man!"

In order to lose no time he at once started toward the person he so longed to see.

Intervening rocks and trees soon hid him from his gaze, but the boy kept resolutely on in the direction where he supposed him to be. He had proceeded some distance when his further progress was prevented by a torrent that rushed, brawling and foaming, down a sloping height.

"How I'm to cross this beats me!" thought the boy; "and if I don't cross it I'll have to go miles out of my way to get round it."

Looking along the torrent, he saw a place where he thought he might succeed in getting over by leaping along some boulders that projected here and there from the surface of the water.

"It'll be a long jump, but here goes!" muttered the boy as he started.

He got along well enough until he reached the middle of the stream, when, in trying to spring over the space between two boulders further apart than the others, his foot slipped, and he was precipitated into the torrent!

His situation was now one of great peril, for he was carried along by the rushing waters with a force

he could not resist, and, a little beyond, the torrent plunged over a high rock, falling to its base upon another—a distance of thirty feet!

The boy, realizing his danger, tried in vain to clutch some of the projecting rocks past which he was borne. In his struggles his belt became loosened, causing his pistol and knife to fall out, and his rifle also coming off, he thus lost all his weapons. He was close to the brink of the height over which the water fell when he was whirled against a boulder, which, for an instant, stayed his progress.

He caught at the boulder, but his hand slipped from the slimy rock, and he was being carried on when he saw another and smaller rock within reach of his hands.

He clutched it, and to this he clung with a tenacious hold, while the force of the torrent drew his legs over the brink of the cataract.

Tom vainly strove to draw himself forward, so as to get his arms about the rock, as this would afford him a better hold.

Every moment his grasp became weaker, and he was certain that he would soon have to let go and suffer the dreadful fate there seemed no way of avoiding!

Suddenly, just as he felt that he could not keep his hold two minutes longer, he saw a man appear on the side of the torrent he had endeavored to reach before he fell.

The man was an unprepossessing person.

He wore a dirty buckskin shirt, and in a belt about his waist was his only weapon—a long knife.

On his head, which was covered with a shock of tangled black hair, was a round beaver cap, which added to the ugliness of his visage.

He was almost as dark as a mulatto, had a coarse, brutal mouth, a club nose, a low forehead and bloodshot eyes.

Instead of showing the least sympathy for the boy or making any effort to rescue him, the stranger stood with folded arms, grinning at him as if enjoying his perilous situation.

Tom felt certain that this could not be the "magician."

"Whoever you are, for God's sake help me!" he cried.

"Help? What, ain't yer having a nice bath? Doesn't it feel good, this warm weather, eh?"

"Don't joke about it," said Tom. "I cannot hold on a minute longer, and I shall be dashed to death on the rocks below."

"Don't see what I kin do for yer."

"By just walking out on that rock that projects from the shore, in front of me, you can reach over, take hold of my shoulders, and help me out."

"Well, perhaps I kin, but I don't know as I keer to bother, 'cept on one condition, which is that you agree to help me in a little job I hev before me."

"Anything that's right I'll do."

The man's eyes twinkled.

"It's right enough to *my* thinkin', but as ther's no time to lose, I may as well tell yer that it's to help me track a sartin person I want to put my knife in. It's a white man, understand, not an Injun!"

Tom shuddered. What sort of a person was this, to make such a proposal?

That he was a scamp, a villain of the vilest sort, was evident.

"Come, what do yer say? I didn't mind owning up to you, you see, because I know that 'dead folks kin tell no tales.'"

Tom quickly made up his mind. He would pretend to be willing to help the rascal, in order not only to save his life but also that of the person the man seemed bent on destroying.

"All right," he shouted; "I'm willing to help you!"

"Done, then!" cried the fellow, as he ran out to the edge of the projecting rock.

He reached over, seized the boy under the shoulders with both hands, and drew him out upon the rock.

"Now then, boy, I hev yer under 'my finger and thumb. You are my slave, to do everything as I order."

"It won't be for long!" was Tom's mental comment.

As if reading his thoughts, the *russlan* continued:

"Don't yer try any game on me. It'll be the worse for yer if yer do. Ther'll be a knife in yer heart the minute yer try to kick ag'in' yer fate, or my name isn't Ben Barbeck."

"Well, tell me what you want me to do," said Tom.

"Now yer begin to talk. Ther's nothing like threatenin' a boy. I hev always found it to work about right."

"Have you?" thought the lad. "I rather think you'll be mistaken in this case."

"Do yer see that rock away off as fur as yer kin look—that rock with the dead tree atop of it?" inquired the man pointing far ahead.

"I see it," replied Tom.

"Well, I want yer to make fur that rock! Come, go on—march!"

Tom moved forward, and, after a long and toil some tramp, during which the boy's companion kept close behind him, the two reached the rock.

"Thar he is!" cried the man, pointing out the figure of the person whom Tom had supposed to be the "magician."

The latter stood upon a lofty rock, intently gazing toward the spot where the glittering knob had been visible, as if still looking for the slinking object.

"You see him?" said the man.

"Yes," answered Tom.

"Well, do you know what he is after?"

"I believe it's something that he is curious about—something that glitters ahead of—"

"Ho!" interrupted Barbeck, "so you know about it, too. I'll bet my head you were after that lump of gold too! Thar's too many of us after it."

"Gold?" said Tom.

"Yes, what kin that glittering ball be but a lump o' gold, and it's Barbeck that's going to hev it—not t'other chap. He's got to knock under."

"Is it for that you want to kill him?"

"Most, but not altogether. You heard of the attempt to rob the mail-coach from Montana several years ago?"

"I think I did."

"Well, I was in that scrimmage with my son."

"One of the robbers?"

"Right thar. I'll own up. The passengers fou't hard, and we had to run. My son was shot dead. One of the passengers shot him. It was the man ahead. Now you kin see that it's natural I should want to hev his life."

"Why have you put it off so long?"

"Why?" growled Barbeck, "because I hev fur years been away. Some on us, me among t'others, was arrested by Vigilantes. Some was hung and some was banished, me among the last. But, arter the thing had blown over a little, I contrived to sneak back and hyar I am, determined to kill the man that killed my son. That's what I call *squar'*. But I want to make a sure thing of it, and that's why, seein' you, I thought of gittin' you to help me. When we reach the chap, you are to turn his attention from me by talkin' to him so as to give me a chance to put my knife between his shoulders. Come on!"

They moved toward the rock about half a mile off, on which stood the "magician," Barbeck still compelling the boy to keep in front of him.

"Remember, no treach'ry!" he said. "The minute you show any sign of it, you'll git my knife in yer ribs!"

Tom, however, was resolved to make an attempt to save the life of the intended victim at any risk.

"Thar! curse it! he's out o' sight again!" growled the *russlan*, as the "magician" passed from view by descending the elevation on the other side.

The two toiled on, but they did not catch another glimpse of Mr. Temple that day.

At night they paused in a deep, rocky valley.

Barbeck pulled some black-looking bread from his wallet, and gave a piece to his companion.

"That'll do for you," he said, as he took out a slice of venison for his own supper.

When the meal was finished, Barbeck snatching the coil of rope that Tom still carried from his shoulders, pointed to a rocky projection.

"Sit down thar!" he ordered.

"What for?" inquired the lad.

"Never mind; ef yer resist, you'll git this in yer gizzard!"

And he flourished the knife.

Tom sat down by the rock, and the man lashed him to it with the line, leaving length enough for him to lie down.

"Now you kin go to sleep, and so kin I," said Barbeck.

Spreading out his dirty blanket, he stretched himself upon it, and was soon in a sound slumber.

CHAPTER XVI.

Tom's Stratagem.

The moment he was sure that his companion was asleep Tom tried to free himself from his bonds.

He rubbed the rope against the rock in the hope of thus severing it, but in vain.

Finding that he could in no way clear himself from the cords, he finally lay down on the rubber blanket, which he had been allowed to put under him, and also fell asleep.

When he awoke the sun was shining. Barbeck had just risen, and was rubbing his eyes. He unfastened the lad's cords, and a meal like the one of the previous night was partaken of.

Then the two, as on the previous day, toiled among cliffs and crags, searching for Mr. Temple.

Reaching an elevated point, they saw still far ahead of them, the glittering "Eye of the Morning"—that flashing ball of dazzling light, which Barbeck had said was gold!

"We kin never git thar, in the world," cried the man. "Still, I kin try, and as you are light and kin climb, I shall set yer to risking yer neck to reach it—that is ef we kin find exactly whar the 'farnal place is! Hello! thar's our man!" he added, as the magician now made his appearance on a cliff, a quarter of a mile off, between them and the gold knob.

In order to lose no time Barbeck now made a "straight track," as he termed it, for his intended victim.

Not once did the two lose sight of him as they proceeded.

At length they reached a rock bordering a deep valley, which was now all that lay between them and Mr. Temple.

They descended into the valley, and were soon climbing the hight on the summit of which the "magician" stood.

Tom felt his heart beat fast as they approached the man he had so long been striving to reach.

The moment was at hand for him to execute a plan he had formed in his mind for saving the life of that person.

The latter did not hear the two coming, engrossed as he was with the survey of the spot where the gold knob had been visible, but from which it had now vanished in its usual sudden manner.

"Easy, thar—easy! Not too fast!" whispered Barbeck, clutching Tom by the back of his hunting-jacket.

The boy slackened his pace; at the same moment the magician, without looking around, commenced to descend the rock on the other side.

Hurrying to the summit, the two could obtain a glimpse of his form, now and then, as he climbed down among a mass of rocks below them.

"Now is our time," said Barbeck. "Quick is the word!"

Tom descended rapidly, but looking askance at his follower, he saw that he was close behind, with his drawn knife firmly grasped, to be used at any sign of treachery on the part of the boy.

The latter realized that, to insure the safety of the magician, it was necessary to get rid of his companion ere the two should reach the side of the marked victim, as otherwise, in spite of all his efforts to prevent it, Barbeck might succeed in accomplishing his purpose.

Watching his chance, the boy suddenly, pretending to strike his feet against a projection fell across the path of Barbeck, who, ere he could check himself, stumbled against his body, and was thrown over and beyond him with some violence.

Tom sprung up like lightning, and leaping down the descent, uttered an ear-splitting yell to attract the attention of the magician, who was now some yards below him with only the top of his hat visible above a rock.

It chanced that Mr. Temple was, at that moment, close to a chasm, which sloped down among a mass of tangled vines and briars.

Startled by the sudden, unearthly yell behind him, he made a movement as he turned which brought his foot on the edge of the chasm. A piece of loose rock giving way, he slid down the side of the opening among the vines and briars.

As Tom had not been where he could see how he had vanished, he was greatly surprised at his disappearance when he arrived at the place where he had last thought he would find him.

Meanwhile, above him, he could hear the angry shouts of Barbeck, as he rapidly descended the cliff in search of him.

"You young raskill I'll cut yer heart out! A fine trick you've played me!" cried the infuriated man, as he came on, flourishing his knife.

Tom swiftly scrambled down the hight.

Finally he reached a place where the rocks would hide him from his pursuer, and there he paused to rest.

He heard the man go past him, and peering from behind a rugged projection, he watched him until he was out of sight.

"Now, then," muttered Tom, "what can have become of that magician? Magician he seems to be, in reality, to vanish in such a mysterious way."

He emerged from his hiding-place, and searched for the person he was so eager to find, but was unsuccessful.

Tired and hungry, the boy at sundown sat down to rest.

A feeling of dismay came over him when he thought of his situation. There he was, in the very heart of those savage mountains, with nothing remaining in his wallet but a package of salt, with no rifle—no weapons of any kind to enable him to procure game.

The scant fare he had obtained from Barbeck, while he was in his company, had left him half famished.

"I'm worse off than I've been yet," he muttered—"and—"

He was interrupted by the sharp report of a rifle, not far off, and, looking in the direction of the sound, he saw the smoke of the piece drifting from a deep pine thicket, not a quarter of a mile off.

"Some hunter!" thought the lad. "I hope it may prove to be a white one, as I'm in a bad fix, lit to fall into the hands of an Indian, now."

He rose and moved off toward the thicket, but so difficult was the way that he was nearly half an hour in arriving within fifty yards of it.

Through the shadows of the trees he fancied he could see a figure gliding off. He watched it keenly, and, finally, as it crossed an open glade and disappeared from his view in the shadows beyond, he recognized it as that of the "magician."

He shouted with all his might, hoping to attract the man's attention, but his efforts were unsuccessful; the "magician" did not return. Tom moved

on, and entered the thicket, just as the shadows of twilight were gathering about him. As he looked around him, he saw the remains of a black-tailed deer, which Mr. Temple had shot, and the best part of which he had taken with him. There was enough left, however, to last Tom for some days, if properly prepared. With a small jack-knife he still possessed, he contrived to cut the meat into chunks. Then, finding some dry fagots, he heaped them together, and, with some matches, which he had left in the tight, waterproof match-safe he had brought from home, he lighted them.

He roasted the chunks of meat, first salting them thoroughly from the supply of salt which was in his wallet, and in this way he soon had his provisions prepared for use. He made a hearty meal, and having quenched his thirst, from a spring, near the place, he put out the fire.

Thinking that Barbeck might be lurking in the vicinity, and that he might have seen the light of the flames, Tom now moved off some distance from the spot, that the ruffian might not succeed in finding him. He had reached the edge of the thicket, when, far ahead of him, he saw a gleam of light.

"It is the 'magician' preparing his meat as I've just done," muttered the boy. "Wonder if I could reach that place in the dark."

He made the attempt, but having narrowly escaped a fall from a high rock he had climbed, and no longer seeing the fire, he thought it best to halt for the night.

Spreading his rubber blanket on a moss-covered rock, he soon fell into a deep slumber.

He awoke at sunrise, and looked around him. No human being greeted his gaze.

After breakfast, he ascended a lofty peak near him, hoping to again get sight of the gold knob, thinking he might see the "magician" at the same time.

There it was, sure enough, that glittering orb—gleaming still far away among steep cliffs, which looked as if they could never be climbed.

This time, however, he watched in vain for the person he searched for.

"Well, never mind," he thought, "if I can only get to that knob, I feel sure that I shall meet him there!"

He at once set out. For two days he made every exertion to reach the shining prize.

On the morning of the third day, he discovered that only a deep, rocky valley separated him from the cliffs among which shone the knob of gold!

CHAPTER XVII.

IN A TRAP.

ALTHOUGH so near the golden prize, yet Tom was puzzled to know how he was to get to it.

The cliffs appeared to be too steep to climb. The one on the other side of the valley, rising, apparently, to a height of two hundred feet, presented on the surface of its rocky wall scarcely a hold for hand or foot.

"Perhaps there may be some other way to get to the top of it," muttered the boy.

He went down into the valley, and soon discovered a gully extending from the edge of the cliff. He followed this rugged passage, which described a gradual ascent, until he was obliged to halt at the end of it, where it terminated at the edge of a deep chasm.

He looked up at the cliff on his right which formed one side of the gully. It was a perilous one to mount, affording scant hold, most of the way, but the boy resolved to attempt it.

The top of the peak was about seventy feet above him. When half-way up, the lad standing on a narrow ledge, from which there was some danger of slipping, could not reach the next projection, which would have enabled him to gain a part of the wall where the climbing was easy. He thought of his belt, and taking it off, he made a sort of noose at one end by drawing this end through the buckle.

Throwing up the noose, he brought it over the rocky projection; then, seizing the belt with both hands, he drew himself up, and planting his feet in a niche, succeeded in reaching the desired support. The rest of the way to the summit was easy, and Tom soon found himself upon it.

Although now probably not many yards from the gold knob, yet he looked in vain for it. He must wait until the next morning when the rays of the sun, at a certain hour, would strike the precious mass so as to make it glitter.

From his lofty position the boy again took a survey of the country behind him.

In the distance, descending a cliff, he saw a figure, which he thought he could recognize as that of Barbeck, and about a quarter of a mile ahead of him, he beheld the "magician."

"All three of us bound for the gold knob," muttered the boy. "One thing is sure—I have the start, and will get there first, so that the ruffian, Barbeck, will not win the prize, after all. But let me see if I can't get still nearer to it. I will go down this cliff and climb the one beyond, which I think will bring me closer to the knob."

The cliff was not hard to descend, nor was the opposite one difficult to mount. Tom finally gained the top of it and resolved to proceed no further until next morning's sun should again show him the exact situation of the knob.

That day and the following night Tom kept an occasional lookout both for the "magician" and for Barbeck.

When morning came he gazed around him in all directions, but he could see no sign of either of the two men he looked for.

He now watched for the precious knob.

The sun had risen, but it was not yet high enough to show him the object. At length, however, it burst upon his sight! A cry of joy escaped him, for the prize glittered upon the summit of the opposite peak, and only this would he be obliged to ascend to reach it.

He descended the height he occupied, and finally climbed the cliff before him. Arrived upon the summit, he found himself among a mass of rocks, piled in fantastic confusion all about him. He searched eagerly for the knob, which had appeared to be as large as a man's head, but he was unable to find it.

"The sun is too high now to strike it," he muttered. "I will find it to-morrow."

He watched for it next morning, but to his chagrin and surprise, he could now see nothing of it.

In vain he waited; he saw nothing but dull, dead rocks, which reflected no gleam as the bright rays fell upon them.

Hither and thither he moved about the summit, looking everywhere, but in vain.

What had become of that great ball of gold? It seemed all at once to have disappeared forever.

Weary and disappointed, the lad sat down to rest on a rock in front of a sort of rugged alcove, near which he had been standing. He fumbled in his wallet for something to eat, but not a morsel of food was left there.

"The 'magician' must come before long," he thought, "and as he is well supplied with provisions I shall be relieved."

He then fastened his kerchief in a crevice of the rock that overhung the alcove.

"That signal will fetch him here," thought Tom. "It will arouse his curiosity to see this where the gold knob was, and it will hurry him along. Perhaps it will hurry Barbeck, too. Well, if he gets here first, I can easily keep clear of him until the one I want to see comes up. By jingo! how hungry I am! Wonder if I can't find some berries to eat."

He descended from the height, and when half-way down he noticed some huckleberries on a bush. He partook of them greedily, but he looked in vain for more. He found lower down some pennyroyal growing in a niche near a mossy rock. The herb

was promptly bucked and swallowed by the hungry boy. As he continued to search for something else, he noticed that the cliff he had ascended could be reached by a narrow passage which probably commenced far to the right of the first elevation he had ascended. Had he known this before, it would have saved him from the tiresome and perilous exertions he had made to climb the difficult height. He found some more herbs, which he chewed and swallowed. They made him so drowsy that he could not keep his eyes open, and ere he was aware of it, he was lying asleep in a hollow near the passage, at the base of the elevation.

He was rudely awakened by some person shaking him violently by the shoulder. On opening his eyes he beheld the repulsive face of Barbeck above him.

"Curse you!" cried the man, fiercely. "So I have found you at last! A pretty trick you played me!" he added, as he aimed the point of his knife at the lad's heart, while holding him down by the collar with his other hand. "Now, then, what do you suppose keeps me from putting this knife in you? I'll tell you—it is that lump of gold!"

"Gold?" repeated Tom, scarcely knowing, in his confusion at being so suddenly awakened, what he said.

"Yes, that gold knob! Tell me what you've done with it or I'll kill you sure's you're born!"

"I have not seen it—have not found it yet," answered Tom.

"Thar's a lie! The knob was to be seen shinin' on top of the cliff 'fore you got thar, but, after that, it vanished. Of course you know where it is. You've hid it somewhere."

"No, I have not. I have not been able to find it."

"What's yer signal doing on top of the cliff then?—that white handkercher? You put it there fur that 'magician' chap, to let him know you'd found the gold and to bring him here."

In vain Tom continued denying he had found the knob. Barbeck told him he lied. When, springing back, he pulled some heavy bowlders down over the entrance of the hollow.

"You are not going to keep me shut up here!" cried Tom. "I will starve to death!"

"That's jest it," was the answer. "I'm going to starve you into telling me what you've done with the knob. When you are ready you can call me. I'm going now to watch fur the 'magician'—to lay fur him, and ef I don't contrive this time to fix his goose fur him, you can call me any name yer like. He shall never larn from you what you've done with the precious gold lump."

So saying the man walked off, while Tom, who found that he could not move the heavy bowlders, watched him through a crevice.

"I shall starve to death here," muttered the boy, in dismay. "Only one thing can save me, and that will be the failure of this man's attempt on the life of the 'magician.' In that case I can, I hope, make myself heard by him, and get help from him."

As he spoke he suddenly started on beholding the grim figures of three Blackfoot Indians emerge from the passage leading to the base of the cliff. The savages came and seated themselves close to the bowlders over the entrance of the hollow occupied by the boy.

They made a table of the very bowlder beneath the crevice through which he had been looking, spreading upon it some venison, of which they commenced to partake.

Tom wistfully eyed the meat. The Blackfeet, as soon as they had finished their meal, walked off, leaving some fragments of venison on the rock. No sooner were they out of sight than Tom pulled these pieces into the hollow with his fingers and greedily devoured them. They were the tougher parts of the venison, which the Indians had not cared for, but never before had meat tasted so sweet to the boy.

Much refreshed by his meal Tom made renewed exertions to remove the bowlders from the entrance

of the hollow. Finally it chanced that the edge of the lower bowlder crumbled, thus causing the upper one to fall. The boy emerged from the hollow and looked carefully about him. He thought the Blackfeet might still be lurking near, and he therefore moved cautiously, keeping behind a ridge as he made his way toward the summit of the cliff.

Where was Barbeck?

Probably lying carefully hidden somewhere among the rocks to escape being discovered by the Indians.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GOLD KNOB.

Tom kept on toward the summit of the cliff, which he finally reached.

He crouched among the rugged masses there, where he found his kerchief, which had been blown down from the crevice in which he had put it. He hoped that the Blackfeet had not seen the signal; if they had, they would be sure to come to the top of the elevation. He crept into the alcove, and there he sat, keeping a careful lookout over the edge of a rock in front of him.

Once he fancied he saw, for a moment, the heads of the Indians above some rugged masses near the passage leading to the base of the height, but he was not sure as the shades of night now were closing.

All through that night the boy kept a good lookout from the alcove. His long sleep in the daytime made him feel wakeful, while the food he had eaten had restored to him his strength for the present.

At dawn he could see nothing of the Indians or of Barbeck. Just at sunrise he beheld two forms afar off moving to the southward.

"There they are! two of the Indians, at any rate, and I don't think the other one can be far from them. Now that they have gone, I am again in danger from Barbeck."

As yet, however, there was no sign of the ruffian.

"When he does come, I will try the effect of these," he muttered, looking at some bowlders near him. "I can roll these down and they will keep him back for a while, at least."

Just then Tom saw the sun rise above one of the mountain peaks and pour its lurid light directly into the alcove, upon his face.

He moved a little to one side to avoid the blinding rays, and, at the same moment, as he half turned, an exclamation of joy and surprise escaped him!

On the back wall of the alcove, a large mass of granite, of which the boy had not previously taken much no ice, was now glittering like a ball of fire! Jets of sparkling light seemed to issue from all sides of it, and, in the quivering radiance, Tom could easily detect the reddish-yellow luster of gold!

"Found! found!" he cried, as he sprung in front of the shining mass to take a better survey of it.

But now the luster seemed at once to leave the rugged ball, which looked like a mass of bright granite, with streaks and chunks of a coppery hue adhering to it.

"It must be gold," muttered Tom, "but had I not just seen how it shone, I would not have noticed it at all! What, in the name of Christopher, keeps it, all at once, from shining?"

As he spoke Tom chanced to step aside, when again, as before, the rugged piece of granite was one brilliant blaze of light!

"I have it now!" cried the boy, "it was my getting between it and the sun, which spoiled the glitter! Yes, and that is why I was not able to find it before. Every time I got in front of it, I shut out the sun's light from it, so that the lump did not shine, and I only saw a dead mass of granite with nothing particular about it to draw my attention. My kerchief hanging down over the alcove, also concealed the bright knob."

Looking closely at the mass, which was about the size of an ordinary pumpkin, Tom perceived that it was held to the wall of the alcove by a very narrow

stem. The idea of trying to detach it from the wall now occurred to the lad, and, picking up one of the bowlders near, he struck the stem with it. He was obliged to repeat the blow several times ere the knob gave way, but, no sooner had he dislodged it, than he regretted having done so.

The "magician," no longer able to see the glittering ball, would probably now either turn off in some other direction, in the idea that he was going the wrong way, or would give up all further attempts to find the shining object of his search.

"Yes, that was a bad move of mine," muttered the boy, as he sat down by the precious lump, scanning it closely.

Except where it was streaked and veined with chunks of the yellow metal, and plated with bright mica, the knob was of pure white granite, which, in some places, looked almost transparent.

"What shall I do with it?" the lad mentally asked himself. "It is too heavy for me to carry."

After some reflection, he concluded to conceal it in some cleft of the rocks, carefully marking the spot, so that he could find it at any future time. He would then watch for the "magician," and if he saw him near enough, shout to him, informing him of his discovery, which he thought would prevent further attempts on the man's part to avoid him.

Pushing the knob out of the alcove, Tom was about to carry out his intention, when to his dismay, he beheld Barbeck climbing toward him up the elevation.

The ruffian's gaze was fixed upon the valuable prize, and his eyes shone with a fierce, greedy expression.

"Ho, ho! youngster!" he cried, "so I have caught you in the act! Don't be skeered, though. I won't hurt yer, if you jest quietly give up that piece of gold to me, and clear out!"

Tom, however, knew better. He knew enough of the villain's character to be sure that he meant to kill him, that he might "tell no tales," as he had formerly expressed it. In fact, the fellow held his knife firmly grasped in his right hand, and if ever "murder" was written on a man's face, it was to be seen in the evil expression of this person's visage.

Unarmed as he was, the boy at once had recourse to the bowlders he had previously placed in readiness near the edge of the steeply-sloping declivity.

He rolled them down toward his approaching enemy, who had several narrow escapes from being struck by them.

"You cursed young rat. I'll cut yer to pieces when I git up thar!" he shouted.

Already he was half-way up, and Tom had now used all the bowlders.

Although he was but a boy, and felt certain that this strong ruffian with his knife must soon overpower him, yet he braced himself for a desperate struggle.

There was no way for him to retreat, even had he been disposed to do so, for on the other side the precipice was too steep for him to descend.

Every moment the man drew nearer. Only about six yards separated the two, when, all at once, an Indian rose from behind a rock, just in the rear of the villain, and raising his tomahawk, aimed it at his head.

This savage was evidently one of the three Blackfeet, who on the day before had visited the place. He had contrived to lurk somewhere among the rocks, on the watch for Barbeck, unknown to the latter.

The tomahawk flew whistling from his hand, and would have split the skull of the intended victim, had not that person stooped at the instant, in his efforts to climb over a protruding rock in his way.

Turning quickly, on hearing the noise of the instrument, he and the savage faced each other. And now Tom was the witness of a desperate conflict between the two. The Indian had no rifle, and he at once drew his knife. The combatants closed in a death-tussle, striking at each other with their long

knives, that flashed, glittered and clashed together, as they were rapidly wielded. The boy shuddered to see the blades plunged into the warm flesh, again and again, to be withdrawn reddened with blood. As many as twenty blows had been given and received, ere Barbeck contrived to drive his weapon to the haft in the heart of his adversary, who with a grunt, then dropped dead at his feet!

The knife of the ruffian fell from his grasp. He had received several terrible thrusts, and placing a hand on his side, where there was a ghastly cut, he fell upon the rock, the blood flowing fast from his wounds.

"Water! water!" groaned the sufferer. "For God's sake! come here and help me a little! I'm past hurting ye, now!"

Tom was soon at his side, kneeling down by him.

"Thar's water in the canteen at my side," gasped the man. "Quick, give me some!"

The boy raised the canteen to the speaker's lips.

"I'm goin'," he said, as soon as he had taken a draught. "It's all up with me, now! Them cussed Blackfeet has had a grudge ag'in' me ever since they found I cheated 'em about the gal! Somehow they got on my trail this time, and now it's all up with me!"

His breath came with difficulty; he was fast dying.

"Hyar, boy," he continued, in a low, husky voice. "Jest put yer hand inside my hunting-shirt. Thar you'll find a paper!"

Tom did as requested, drawing forth a dirty sheet of folded writing-paper.

"Now, then, I want yer to do me a favor. Do yer see the direction on that paper?"

"Yes!" cried Tom, with surprise. "It is Buck Bowie!"

"This Buck Bowie is a young hunter and trapper, often to be found at some o' the settlements near hyar. Now you'll do a dyin' man a favor, ef you'll promise to hunt fur that chap and put this paper in his hands. It's of great importance to him—some-thin' about his sister—a gal who was lost years ago! Will you promise?"

Tom had become as pale as death. Never before had such terrible remorse racked him as now.

"Buck Bowie is dead!" he gasped. "He and I fought a duel, a few days ago, and I killed him!"

But Barbeck heard only a part of the sentence. All at once, with a convulsive upward movement of the body, and a gurgling in his throat, he expired!

CHAPTER XIX.

A DISAPPEARANCE.

For some moments Tom Temple stood looking down at the dead bodies of Barbeck and the Indian.

Then he thrust the paper the dying man had given him into his pocket.

He sat down, suffering the keenest anguish at the thought of his former friend, whose death he had caused.

"No use of this paper now," he muttered, sadly. "Perhaps it contains the information that his sister is living! Oh, what have I done! It is terrible! terrible!"

For some minutes the boy forgot all about the precious gold knob lying so near him.

Gradually, however, he shook off, with a powerful effort, these feelings of distress, and turned his attention to the prize.

Rolling it to the base of the height, he pushed it into a hollow, over which he piled several of the bowlders he had thrown down. The rock was one of peculiar formation, a slender column rising above the hollow, with a top not unlike the head of a buffalo. The boy thought he could be able to find this rock at some future time, especially as the peak at the base of which it stood, was higher than any of those which surrounded it, and bore upon its top rugged masses which, seen from below and from a

further distance, bore some resemblance to the dome of a temple.

Now ascending, Tom took possession of the dead man's knife, and also of the Indian's tomahawk. He also transferred from Barbeck's wallet to his own such provisions as he found there, enough at least to last him for several days.

Then climbing to the top of the peak, he looked for the "magician."

At first he saw no sign of him, but chancing to turn his eyes to the southward, he suddenly beheld him, standing on the ledge of a precipice, about half a mile off, gazing intently toward the summit of the cliff occupied by the lad.

Shouting and waving his kerchief, Tom endeavored to attract his attention. Evidently the man saw him, but he made no response to his motions, except to shake his head once in the negative.

Finally the "magician" descended from his position, and the boy did not again see him until next morning. He was now on a peak to the eastward of the one he had previously occupied, again watching for the glittering knob. He seemed to think he must have been mistaken about its location, for his gaze was turned away from Tom, as if he expected to see the knob in that direction.

As before, Tom vainly motioned and signaled to draw him that way. He stood long, scanning the cliffs about him, as soon as the sun was above the lights; when, not seeing the glittering object looked for, he made a movement of chagrin and disappointment. A few minutes later Tom saw him descend the light, to soon disappear among the rocks.

Watching keenly, the boy afterward caught, now and then, a glimpse of his form as he moved on.

"He is probably going back to his home in the mountains," thought the lad. "By following I may overtake him."

He at once commenced to descend the cliff, and keeping on in the direction where he had last observed the "magician," he finally saw him, far ahead.

As Tom had thought was the case, Mr. Temple had given up, for the present, any further attempt to find the gold knob.

"This is the fourth time," he muttered, as he pursued his way, "that I have been balked. That gold ball seems to be a sort of Will-o'-the-wisp. Will I ever find it? Months ago, while on another hunt for it, it seemed to me that I was on the very cliff where I should have found it, and yet I could see nothing of it! It is strange, very strange!"

As may be surmised, Mr. Temple, on the occasion of which he spoke, had been close to the treasure he was so anxious to find, but his getting *between it and the sun* was what had prevented his discovering it, for the shadow thrown over the granite ball by the roof of the alcove, had given to it the appearance of a mass of dull, valueless rock. It was only by the merest accident that Tom Temple, as shown, had discovered the prize. It had chanced that he entered the alcove, otherwise he would never have made the discovery, for the entrance was so narrow that any one in front of it must come between the light and the valuable knob. Inside, the alcove widened, affording room for a person to step to one side of the precious mass, and thus it was that the boy had found the golden treasure.

"It is time I returned," continued Mr. Temple. "When I dropped into that chasm, I bruised my arm so that I can now hardly use my rifle for shooting game."

The chasm he alluded to was the one into which he had fallen, on that day, when so startled by Tom's yell.

He descended about ten feet, when he was caught by a mass of tough vines, and as he struggled among them grasping at the stems, his feet touched a rock. This proved to be the bottom of what he had supposed to be a deep chasm, but which, in reality, was thus shown to be a mere shallow cleft. Following

the course of the bottom of the cleft, which described a gradual descent, Mr. Temple had finally emerged into a valley, and kept on his way, hoping he would not again be troubled by the person who was searching for him. That this was a boy he had known by the sound of the voice calling him, and he resolved to keep clear of him, if possible.

"It must be the fellow who imagines he is my son," he muttered. "I will try to keep out of his sight, and so discourage him and oblige him to go back to the settlement."

Afterward, when he saw the signal on the cliff, and beheld the boy motioning to him, he was much annoyed, and, as shown, he would not go to him.

Now as he moved on toward his mountain home, he hoped he had shaken off this troublesome young intruder.

Little did he imagine that the latter, dodging about among the rocks, far behind him, was endeavoring to keep him in sight and to overtake him.

"Glad enough I will be to get back to my telescope," he continued, still talking to himself. "That is a good instrument, and it has been my salvation with the Indians. How fortunate that I found it—there in the mountain cave, left because it was out of order by United States surveyors. At first I did not think I could repair it, but there is nothing like perseverance, and, at last, with a good deal of trouble, I managed to fix it well enough, at any rate, to suit my purpose. As usual, when I look through it again, I expect to see that tantalizing gold knob shining as bright as ever!"

In a couple of days Mr. Temple found himself within four or five miles of his mountain home. Coming toward him he was then surprised enough to see his deformed assistant—Mr. Jameson.

The latter wore an eager look on his hideous face; his eyes seeming about to burst from their sockets.

"Where is it?" he cried, as he came up.

"Where is what?"

"The treasure—that gold prize—that glittering knob you went after!"

"My usual luck," growled Mr. Temple. "When I got near the place where it ought to be, I could see nothing of it."

"You are jesting!" cried Jameson.

"I feel like anything but jesting," answered Mr. Temple. "A few more confounded useless trips like this one will upset me."

"You have not got the knob?"

"Got it—no!" roared Mr. Temple in an ill humor.

"You seem surprised."

"I have good reason to be. If you have not that gold knob, *some one else* has it, or it has dropped out of sight!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it can no longer be seen through the telescope. I have looked and looked, but in vain."

"Nonsense!"

"It is so, I tell you!"

"Pooh! you have pointed it the wrong way. Wait until I look through it, and I will soon show you the direction of the knob. Then, unless you turn blind before that, you'll see it fast enough."

Jameson shook his head.

"You'll be convinced when you look yourself," he said. "But speaking of being blind reminds me of that boy, who seemed to think he was your son. I sent him off several days ago, so that you'll not again be troubled by him. So far from *his* having lost an eye, both of his eyes are only *too* bright. He is a keen fellow—a determined boy, I can tell you."

"What do you mean by those words—'losing an eye'?" inquired Mr. Temple.

"Did you not tell Linola that your son had lost an eye?"

"No; it is your deafness which has caused you to make this mistake. I said he was cross-eyed."

"Oh! Well, at any rate, I am sure this boy has no such imperfection."

Next morning, at the usual hour for seeing the knob, Mr. Temple had his eye at the telescope.

Then he uttered a cry of surprise.

His assistant had been right. The gold knob was no longer in sight.

CHAPTER XX.

A THRILLING DISCOVERY.

Tom Temple had succeeded in keeping the "magician" in sight the first day after he commenced to follow him, and also for a part of the second, but there were so many obstructions in his way that he had been unable to overtake him. In the afternoon of the second day he lost sight of him.

He kept steadily on however, and finally, by the appearance of the crags and cliffs about him, he knew he was somewhere near the place whence he had been conveyed to the canoe, as described, a few days before.

All at once he shuddered. He was passing the rocky ravine into which Buck had fallen, after being shot, on the day of the duel.

Twilight was closing about him, and as the conscience-stricken boy looked at the shadows falling near the ravine, he could almost imagine he saw the ghostly form of the young trapper near him.

"Halloa, what's that?" he muttered, seeing in reality a form draw itself up on the edge of the ravine from a ledge beneath, on which it had been crouching. There was no answer, and the boy gave a cry of terror as the figure, with a wild whoop, bounded toward him.

The lad saw it plainly enough now. It was the form of a fierce Blackfoot, holding upraised a tomahawk, which he was about hurling at the head of the youth.

The latter stooped just in time to avoid the missile, and drawing the tomahawk which, as previously mentioned, he now had in his possession, he threw it with all his might at the savage.

The Indians of course, have a certain dexterous way of throwing this weapon, so that it will strike a foe blade foremost, but Tom had had no practice of this kind. Instead, therefore of the blade's striking the Indian, it was the other side which came in contact with his skull.

He dropped like a stone on the hard rock, having been knocked senseless by the blow. At the same moment Tom heard other yells and whoops behind him, and could see the outlines of dusky figures moving toward him among the rocks! The boy took to his heels, until, finally, stumbling and falling, he struck his forehead against a rock with force enough to almost stun him. The savages, although they could not now see him through the gloom, were close behind him, and as he sat confused and bewildered, making no attempt to rise, they must soon have been upon him, had not some one seized him by the shoulders, and dragged him quickly forward into a hut, a few feet from the spot where he had fallen.

It was Linola's mother—the old Indian squaw, who had thus come to Tom's assistance.

The moment he was in the hut, she closed the door.

"Lie still," she said, "and Indians go by."

A moment later, peering through an opening in front of the hut, she saw the outlines of the savages as they went rushing past.

"You have saved my life, Mokatook," said Tom, gratefully. "Why have you helped me, when it is your tribe who want my scalp?"

"Mokatook not want see boy lose his scalp," she answered. "Linola not want—nor magic-man, either; but boy must stay here until Mokatook take him safe from this place."

"I will not leave until I have seen the magician."

"Never can see him."

"Where is Linola?"

"Don't know. Think not far from here."

"I would like to see her."

"White boy better not see. Trouble enough already. Linola not want to see more because make trouble."

"Mokatook, will you do me a favor?"

"What the boy want?"

"You can go to the 'magician'?"

"Mokatook go there sometimes."

"Will you take me to him? I have some news for him—good news which he would be glad to hear."

"Magic-man not want to see white boy. Mokatook not can take him there!"

"Then, if you will go there for me, I will send a message to him. As soon as he gets that, he will be glad enough to see me."

"It is well. Mokatook will go tell him what boy want."

"Well, then, go and tell him that I have found what he has been looking for—the gold knob."

"Knob!" said the old squaw, looking perplexed.

"Yes—the GOLD KNOB—don't forget."

Then he took from his pocket the paper which Ben Barbeck had intrusted to his care.

"Take this to him, too. In case anything should happen to me while you are gone—I mean if your people should find me here—it would be best for the magician to have the paper."

The woman took the folded sheet.

Then, having covered Tom with some matting in such a way that he could keep himself concealed under it, if the savages should enter the hut, and bidding him remain in that position during her absence, Mokatook left her habitation.

An hour later she returned.

"Well?" inquired Tom, "did you tell the magician I had found the gold knob?"

"Me tell Linola, and Linola tell 'magic-man.' Me give paper to Linola, too."

"Oh, she was there, then?"

"She near house where magic-man live. She go to him. When she come back, she say magic-man must see the white boy. Sent for white boy to come!"

"At last!" cried Tom, joyfully, "at last we shall meet."

"Come, Mokatook take boy there. Indians all other side of mountain. Now it is a good time."

Tom was soon out of the hut, following his guide. Dim as the light was, Mokatook was of course so familiar with the locality that she had no difficulty in finding her way.

At length, having ascended to the top of a rock, she rolled aside a loose boulder, which had concealed an insignificant opening, just large enough for one person to pass through.

"You come after Mokatook," said the woman, as she entered the opening.

Tom followed, to find himself in a sloping, rocky passage, so low that he was obliged to stoop as he moved on. At length Mokatook, entering a hollow at the termination of the passage, walked along a rocky path which described a gradual ascent.

"So this is the secret path!" thought Tom.

All at once he saw the gleaming of a light ahead, and on turning the angle formed by a projecting rock, he beheld a scene which was well calculated to excite his astonishment.

Directly before him was the opening, leading into a small, comfortably-furnished cave, lighted by a lamp on a rude table. In one corner of this apartment, reclining on a mattress, with his head pillow'd on the arm of Linola, the beautiful Indian girl, who kneeled by his side, was the young trapper, Buck Bowie, whom Tom thought he had shot and killed!

The lad started back with a cry of surprise.

Both Linola and Buck, hearing him, now looked up to see the intruders.

The girl, blushing, rose from her kneeling posture, while Buck, sitting up and staring at Tom, broke out into a loud laugh.

"Halloa, Tom!" he said at last. "I kin truly say, I'm as glad to see you as you are to see me! Don't

stand thar, glaring so at me! I'm not a ghost, I kin asshore you!"

As he spoke he pointed to the remains of a goodly repast on a plate near the mattress.

"Thar's some of my work," he added—"a pound of feed was tuck in by this child an hour ago."

"But what does it mean?" cried Tom. "I thought you were dead—that your body lay at the bottom of the ravine. I am sure I saw you fall into it when I shot you."

"Yes; but, in the fust place, your bullet didn't strike whar it could kill. It hit me jest above the hip, and passed off, slanting through the flesh. In the next place, I didn't fall more'n six feet, though the leaves and vines hid me from your sight. I fell on a mossy shelf of rock projecting out from the side of the ravine, whar I must hev struck the edge of the rock hard enough to take away my senses. When I came to I still found myself lying thar. I tried to git up, but thar seemed to a be a fifty-pound weight in my hip-socket, and I couldn't rise."

"I must hev staid thar the whole day, when I heard some one passing, and called."

"It proved to be that deformed chap, who at last, with Linola's help, and by means of a rope, got me out. They brought me to this cave, whar, thanks to the good car' I hev had, I'm almost able now to get up and walk. Linola has been an angel of kindness to me."

"So I should think," said Tom, dryly—not forgetting he had seen Linola with the young trapper's head pillow'd on her arm.

That the beautiful girl loved Buck he could no longer doubt, and he now resolved, painful as the effort was, to give up all hope of ever being able to win her affections.

Seeing Buck holding out his hand to him, he advanced and frankly grasped it.

"Let the past go," said Buck. "I hope we'll be friends again."

"We will," said Tom. "The knowledge that, after all, I did not cause your death, makes me feel like a new being!"

"Linola glad, too, Linola very glad," said the Indian girl, laying both little hands on Tom's arm, and looking wistfully into his face.

She seemed grieved because he had hardly noticed her since he entered the cave.

"I suppose you and Buck will soon be married now," he said, coldly.

Buck laughed.

"That's onpossible!" he cried.

"Why?" inquired Tom.

"Because," answered Buck, "that gal is my sister!"

"Your sister?"

"Yes, my own long-lost sister!" said Buck.

"You are joking!"

"Not a bit of it. I hev jest found it out—not half an hour since, by that paper which the Russian, Barbeck, left with you, for me!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

As the young trapper spoke he produced the paper from behind his pillow.

"When Mokatook gave Linola this paper," continued Buck, "and she saw that it was directed to me, she put it into my hands. Hyar, read it yourself," he added, presenting it to Tom.

The latter read the contents which were as follows, without the punctuation:

"Though I thot I would never tell you this, Buck Bowie, I hev konclewded to tell you as there's another life to come, and as I hev heard that a man should die with a cheer conshuns. As you've heard, your father and mine was ennemis, and he got away from me the wommun I wanted for my wife, and I swored I woud be even with him, and so one

day, when his daunter—your sister—was four year old and was out picking berries, I tuck her off and gave her to an Injun Blackfoot, named Markook, telling him to kill the young one, if he wanted to, or do with it what he liked, and that I would make him a present of a couple of hosses. I was then in with them Blackfeet, which I had helped in their fights with other tribes, and even agen white folks. Well, the Injun was persuaded not to kill the chile by his squaw, whose name was Mokatook, and who sed she woud bring it up as her own, wich she did and I suppose the gal is still living. I hev never given the hosses I promised to the Blackfeet and that's made them my ennemis. I don't want this paper to fall into your hands except in case of my deth."

"BEN BARBECK."

"Now, then," said Buck, as Tom handed him back the paper, "I know that Linola is my sister, who has been brought up by Mokatook since she was four years old. I questioned the squaw about it as soon as I had read the paper, and when I told her why I did so, she owned that Linola was the white child whom Barbeck had surrendered to her husband. To prove it, she showed me, when Linola came back from the 'magician,' to whom she had conveyed your message, a birth-mark—the mark of a willow-leaf—just above the elbow—which I well remembered my sister had upon her arm!"

"This proves it beyond a doubt!" said Tom, his whole face beaming with joy at the discovery.

"I hope, Tom, you are no longer jealous of your rival?"

"Of course not."

"You no have reason to be," said Linola, blushing. "From the first me like you the best!"

"I am not so sure of that," said Tom. "You did not know Buck was your brother when you were going off to Bannack with him!"

"No, me not know it," said Linola, "but him make mistake. Him think I go with him because like him and want to be his. It was not so. Linola go to get away from Black Thunder, who soon want to inake her his wife. After Black Thunder been killed, then Linola leave Buck, and come back here with the Blackfeet."

Tom was much pleased with this artless confession, especially as the eagerness with which she exculpated herself, proved to him that he was not indifferent to the beautiful girl.

Having remained in the cave a few minutes longer, Tom was conducted to the one occupied by the "magician" and his assistant, a few yards beyond.

The moment the boy saw the face of the "magician" by the light of the cave-lamp, he fancied it had a familiar look—that it was really the face of his father, as he remembered him, although more deeply bronzed and careworn than formerly.

"So, my boy, you have found that gold knob?" said Mr. Temple; "and—"

He uttered an exclamation of surprise as the boy now stood in a position where the light fell full upon his face.

"Good Heaven! is it possible?" he cried. "Why—yes—surely I cannot be mistaken! This lad looks like my son! What was your mother's name, boy, before marriage?"

"Mary Talbot!" he replied.

"Right! that was my wife's name—and yet—although I am almost convinced—you are my boy, Tom, I see nothing of that cast in the eye, which my son had. Can you have outgrown it? But no—I should know better than that! You—"

"I had a cast in my right eye when you went away," said Tom, smiling, "but, a year later, mother took me to a skillful eye-doctor, who cured me of the defect—made my eye perfectly straight!"

"Then, indeed, you are my son," said Mr. Temple, as the two cordially shook hands. "Had I known this before, you would not have been exposed to so many hardships and trials. Was not the operation on your eye very painful?"

"It was—I do not like to think of it," said Tom, shuddering.

Mr. Temple now had many questions to ask about his wife—all of which Tom faithfully answered.

"It is very strange you did not get the letters I sent home," said his father. "I sent as many as a dozen, since coming out here!"

"It must be that they were not posted," said Jameson, who had been a listener to what passed.

"Do you know anything about this, Mokatook?" inquired Mr. Temple, turning to the old squaw, who stood near him. "You told me that the Indian, Tamena, was a good person to send, and I have always sent him with the letters."

"Tamena been take letters and him try to put where you send, but Crow Indians always come—so him been take to odder place—to house in odder settlement. Him say just as good—letters go anyhow."

"That accounts for it," said Mr. Temple. "My letters, not having been put in the mail, have never reached their destination. You should have told me this before, Mokatook."

"T'ink all same—t'ink letters go anyhow," grunted the squaw.

"Now, Tom," said Mr. Temple, turning to his son, "let me hear all about that gold knob."

The boy soon told his story.

"There!" cried his father, when he had concluded, "this convinces me that I have several times been near the knob, standing, perhaps, directly in front of it, without knowing it. Now, then, Tom, we must see if we can find the place in which you have put it."

On the next day Mr. Temple summoned a gathering of the Blackfoot warriors near Mokatook's hut.

He told them that the boy whose scalp they sought was, after all, his own son, and that they must never offer to harm him in any way, otherwise their whole tribe would be swept from the face of the earth. He had had a communication, he said, from the Spirit Hunting-Grounds, while looking through his "glass gun"—from Black Thunder himself, who had charged him to inform his warriors that they must not molest either of the white boys—that it was not the young trapper who had caused his death, but one of the spirits who had done so, in order to prevent his getting the smallpox and giving it to the whole tribe.

This address, delivered in a solemn voice by the great "magic-man," had the desired effect upon the savages, and from that moment the lads were as safe among these Indians as they would have been with civilized people.

Two days later Tom and his father set out to seek the place where the boy had hidden the gold knob.

It was more difficult to find than Tom had imagined it to be, nor, perhaps, would it have been discovered had not the two finally noticed the skeletons of Barbeck and the Indian stretched out on the side of the cliff they were in search of. From their present position father and son perceived that the cliff presented a different appearance than it did from the point where Tom had remarked its peculiar shape when he stowed away the treasure.

The ghastly remains of the two dead men had already been stripped by birds and wolves of every particle of flesh, and the boy shuddered as he paused, and thought of the dreadful conflict he had witnessed between the ruffian and the Blackfoot.

It was now easy to find the hollow into which the lad had pushed the knob, and the latter was soon drawn from the crevice.

Mr. Temple's eyes sparkled.

"What a precious lump," he said, as he inspected the prize. "Tom, our fortune is made!"

"What! Is that knob worth so much?"

"It is worth some thousands of dollars, but this cannot be the only one in these parts! There must be a rich mine here, and all we have to do is to have it worked!"

He walked about among the rocks, inspecting them carefully, and, in some places, he found gold-bearing quartz, which convinced him that he had hit upon a valuable mine. With a hatchet he had brought with him, Mr. Temple now broke up the knob, and having extracted from it a few gold lumps, he put them, with most of the other parts of the granite mass, in a wallet, which he had brought with him for that purpose. Then, having set up a pole, cut from a neighboring thicket, as a mark to enable him to find the place again, he started with his son to return to his mountain home. Jameson was delighted to hear of his success.

"How strange it seems," he said, "that after all, it was your son who enabled you to obtain what you have so long been searching for! Had you not at last consented to see this boy, you would never have found that knob!"

"Poor boy! What trouble you must have had to find me!" said Mr. Temple to his son.

"Yes, sir. I could get no information about you at any of the settlements. You never stopped at any of them—did you?"

"Not longer than a day. I struck out directly for the mountains. I was captured by the Blackfeet, but I showed them the many curious medical instruments in a little medicine chest I carried, and told them I was a great 'magic-man,' come among them for their good. They at once tested my skill by giving me a fever-patient to cure—Mokatook, who had been given up by their own doctors. Fortunately I succeeded in curing her, and, from that moment, my reputation was made, and I had nothing to fear from the Blackfeet, over whom, as you have perceived, I now have a great influence."

Mr. Temple wrote a letter to his wife, informing her of his meeting with their son—of the discovery of the gold-mine, etc. He stated that they would remain to work the mine, but that she might expect to see them before long.

This letter the writer intrusted to Jameson, who went with it to the nearest settlement, whence, with a traveling party, he repaired to Virginia City, where he mailed the missive. On that very day Tom Temple and Linola were seated side by side on a lofty crag overlooking a deep valley.

Linola's beautiful face was sad. She said but little to her companion.

"What are you thinking of?" inquired Tom.

The girl looked up and tried to smile.

"You will go away from here, rich and happy," she said. "You will see plenty of white girl; then you think no more of Linola."

"I shall never forget you," answered the boy. "How could I?"

"White boy soon forget, when not see Linola any more."

"But I will see you!"

"How? when go away?"

"Yes, for you will go with me."

"Linola go with you?"

"Yes; if you are willing to be my wife."

A bright blush appeared on the girl's smooth cheeks—her eyes sparkled.

"Will you marry me?" continued Tom.

For answer Linola put both arms about his neck and bowed her face upon his shoulder.

Soon after, she and Tom appeared before Buck Bowie, who was now so far recovered of his wound as to be able to sit up.

"Hello! so you're hyar! I was wondering whar you were both gone to," he cried.

"Buck," said Tom, "your sister has consented to be my wife."

"Ker-whoop! I expected something of the kind, and now all I hev to say is that you kin marry her jest as soon as you like!"

He grasped Tom's hand and gave it a hearty shake.

"Thar's not a man I'd sooner see her husband than yourself," he continued, "and, ef you don't

Little Buck, the Boy Guide.

make a happy couple, then that's no buffers in Oregon!"

Tom and his father commenced to work the mine as soon as this could be done. It yielded rich profits. Besides the valuable quartz found upon the cliff whence the knob had been obtained, much more was discovered in the rocky valleys lying in the vicinity.

In the course of a few months Mr. Temple, leaving his son to superintend affairs, paid a short visit to his wife, who had received his welcome letter, and who was so overjoyed at seeing him that, from that moment, her health began to improve.

On hearing of Tom's intention of making Linola his wife, Mrs. Temple thought it would be a good plan for the girl to be sent home to her, that she might be educated and otherwise improved.

In due time Linola arrived. She made good progress in her studies, so that when, in the course of a few years, Tom came home to make her his bride, he was more than ever pleased with her manners and appearance.

Meanwhile Buck Bowie, who had recovered from the effects of his wound soon after the finding of the gold knob, continued to pursue his calling of trapper and hunter. Being very industrious and enterprising, he amassed a small fortune, with which he bought a share in Mr. Temple's gold mine.

He was present at his sister's wedding, on which occasion there was not a happier man among the guests than he.

Tom never regretted his marriage with Linola, nor was he ever troubled with the fear of losing her; for, trained to open-air exercise among the wild Rocky Mountains, this girl enjoyed perfect health, which was apparent in her graceful, elastic step, in the bloom of her cheeks, and in the clear brightness of her eyes.

Mining affairs with the Temples continued to prosper.

At last, having obtained millions from the mine, Mr. Temple and his son sold out; after which they remained permanently settled in New York, on a fine estate they had there purchased near the Hudson river.

THE END.

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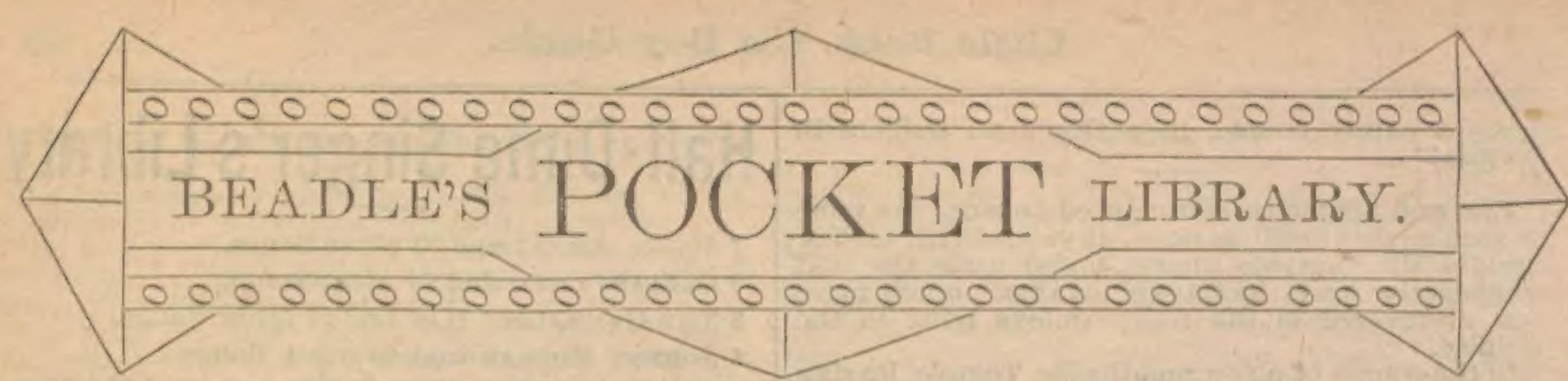
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